

THE
MYSTERIES OF LONDON.

BY
GEORGE W. M. REYNOLDS.

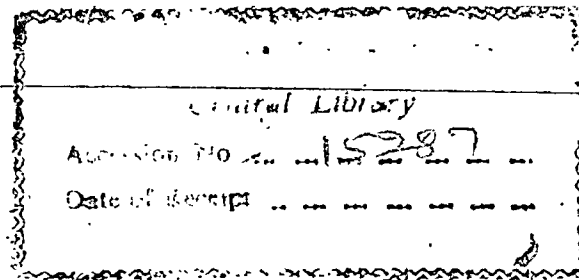
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CHAPTER CX.

CONTINUATION OF THE BLACK'S VISITS TO HIS PRISONERS.

HAVING quitted the dungeon in which Josh Pedler was confined, the Blackamoor proceeded to the next cell; but, instead of opening the door, he merely drew back a small sliding-lid that covered a grated trap, and the faint rays of a light streamed from the inside.

"Tidmarsh," said the Blackamoor, in a feigned tone, "has your mind grown easier?"

"Yes, sir—oh! yes," replied the prisoner from the interior of his dungeon. "Since you allowed me a light and good books, I have been compara-

tively a happy man. I know that I deserve punishment—and it seems to do me good to feel that I am atoning for my offences in this manner. I am not afraid of being alone now; and when I put out my light, I am not afraid of being in the dark."

"You pray with more composure?" said the Black, interrogatively.

"Yes, sir—I can settle my mind to prayer now," was the answer; "and I am sure that my prayers are heard. But pray believe, sir, that I never was so wicked—so very wicked as that bad man who kept me for years in his employ. I know that I was too willing an instrument in his hands; and I am sorry for it now. The thing that lays heaviest on my mind, is the share I had in sending poor Tom Ro-in to the scaffold."

"You are sorry for that deed?" inquired the Black, in a low and slightly tremulous tone.

"Oh! God forgive me!" exclaimed Tidmarsh, his voice expressing sincere contrition. "I do indeed deeply—deeply deplore my share in that awful business; and the ghost of poor Tom Rain used to haunt me when I was first here. In fact, Tom Rain was ever uppermost in my thoughts; and—strange though it may seem—it is not the less true, sir, that your voice appeared to penetrate to my very soul, as if it was Tom Rain himself that was speaking to me. But I have got over all those ideas now—since I learnt to pray; and when I grow dull I read the good books you have lent me. Sometimes I study the Bible; and I find that if I pore over it too much, it makes me melancholy. Then I turn to the Travels and Voyages; and I become tranquil again."

"Should you not rejoice at any opportunity of retrieving your character—even in your old age—and earning an honest livelihood for yourself?" asked the Black.

"Oh! if such a thing could be!" cried the man, in a tone of exultation. "But no—it is impossible, impossible!" he added, after a pause, and speaking in an altered voice. "I have sinned too deeply in respect to poor Tom Rain, to be able to hope for such happiness. God is punishing me in this world, you being His instrument—and yet I can scarcely call it punishment, since you treat me with such kindness. There are times when I even wish that I was more severely punished here, so that I might expiate all my sins, and feel certain about my fate in another world."

"God is full of forgiveness, Tidmarsh," said the Black: "I feel that He is," he added, in a somewhat enthusiastic manner. "The prospect I distantly hinted at in respect to yourself, may possibly become practicable. You are old—but you may still have many years to live; and it would be wrong—it would be detestable not to give you a full opportunity, sooner or later, of enabling you to testify your contrition. But I cannot speak farther on this subject at present. I have brought you some more books: one is a tale—'*The Vicar of Wakefield*'—the perusal of which will do you no harm. It will show you how virtue, though suffering for a time, was rewarded at last. In a few days I shall myself visit you again."

The Black closed the trap, and stood away from the door, which Wilton now opened; and the basket furnished the prisoner with his provisions and also with some volumes of good and beneficial reading.

The visiting-party next proceeded to the cell in which Toby Bunce and his wife were confined together; and here, as in the immediately preceding instance, the Black spoke to them through a sliding trap, from which a light also shone. Cf. p. 1

"For three days have you dwelt together, after dwelling some time apart?" asked the Black, continuing to speak in a low, steady tone. "Larson, of the Blackmoor, continuing to speak in a low, steady tone; and I now conjure you to tell me whether you would rather be thus in each other's company, or separated as before?"

"Oh! leave us together, sir—leave us together, I implore you!" cried Mrs. Bunce, in a voice of earnest appeal. "We are now the best friends in the world; and I have promised my husband never to say a cross word unnecessarily to him again!"

"She seems quite an altered woman, sir," observed Toby. "But then——"

"But then what?" demanded the Black, seeing the man hesitated.

"Well, sir—I will speak my mind free," continued Bunce; "because I'm no longer afraid to do so. I was going to say that perhaps it is this loneliness in which we are placed that makes Betsy talk as she does; and that if we was to be again together out of doors——"

"You would not find me change, Toby," interrupted the woman, but not in a querulous manner. "I like to hear you read to me from the Bible, and from the other good books that the gentleman has given us. I wish we had passed more of our time in this way before we got into all this trouble. But pray, sir," she added, turning towards the door, "do tell me whether you mean to keep us here all our lives!"

"You must ask me no questions, remember," said the Black, in a mild but firm tone. "I have told you this before. Learn to subdue all impatience, and to become resigned and enduring. You have made others suffer in the world;—you have been the agents and tools of a wicked man;—and you now see that heaven is punishing you through the means of one who has power thus to treat you."

"Oh! how I wish that I had never known that detestable Bones!" exclaimed the woman, covering her face with her hands.

"And how I wish that I had stuck to my trade in an honest manner!" cried Toby Bunce in a voice of unfeigned contrition.

"Think of all that—repeat those sentences to each other—as often as you can," said the Blackmoor. "In the course of a few days I shall visit you again."

With these words, he stood back from the door, which Wilton opened; and the two inmates of the dungeon received supplies of wholesome food and moral or instructive books.

The party then proceeded further along the subterranean passage from which the various cells opened.

"Do you mean, sir, to fulfil your intention of this night visiting him?" inquired Caesar, addressing his master in a low, faint, and tremulous tone, as if he were a prey to some vague terror.

The Blackmoor did not immediately answer the question; but, placing his hand upon his brow, appeared to reflect profoundly for almost the space of a minute.

Wilton—who seemed acquainted, as well as Caesar, with all his master's secrets—likewise surveyed the Black with mingled curiosity and apprehension.

"Yes!" at length exclaimed the mysterious personage; "I will now, for the first time since he has been my prisoner here, hold personal communication with Benjamin Bones!"

The party proceeded in silence to a cell near the extremity of the long subterranean passage; and on reaching it, the Black handed the lamp to Caesar, at the same time making a sign to that youth and the other dependants to stand back so that no gleam of the light should penetrate into the dungeon when the door was opened. They obeyed in profound silence; and their master immediately entered the cell, closing the door behind him with that rapidity which is exercised by a brute-tamer when introducing himself into the cage of a wild beast.

The interior of the dungeon was as dark as pitch,—so dark, that there was not even that greyish appearance which obscurity frequently wears to

eyes accustomed to it. It was a darkness that might be felt,—a darkness which seemed to touch and hang upon the visual organs like a dense black mist.

"Who is it?" demanded the sepulchral voice of Old Death, his tone marked with a subdued ferocity and a sort of savage growling which seemed to denote a rancorous hate and pent-up longings for bitter vengeance against the author or authors of his solitary imprisonment.

"I am the person who keeps you here," answered the Black, studying to adopt a voice even more feigned and unlike his natural tones than when he was ere now addressing Tidmarsh and the Bunces.

Still that voice had in it some peculiarity which appeared to touch a chord that vibrated to the very core of Old Death's heart; for he evidently made a starting movement, as he said hoarsely and thickly, "But who are you—a spectre or a living being? Tell me who you are!"

"I am a living being like yourself," was the reply, delivered in a voice disguised in deeper modulations than before. "Are you afraid of being visited by spectres?"

There was a long pause, during which the deep silence was interrupted only by the heavy breathing of Old Death, as if the utter darkness of the place sat oppressively upon him.

"Are you afraid of spectres, I ask?" demanded the Black, who was leaning with folded arms against the door, and with his eyes in the direction where he presumed Old Death to be seated; though not even the faintest outline of his form could he trace amidst that black obscurity.

"Bring me a light, or let me out—and I will answer all your questions," cried Benjamin Bones, his anxiety to obtain his freedom giving a cadence of earnest appeal to his voice in spite of the tremendous rage which his bosom cherished against the individual who had proclaimed himself to be his gaoler.

"Do you deserve mercy?—do you merit the indulgence of man?" asked the Black, in a tone profoundly solemn.

"What do you know of me?—who are you?—why did you have me brought here?—and by what right do you keep me in this infernal place?" demanded Old Death, rapidly and savagely.

"Is it not a just retribution which makes you a prisoner in a subterranean where you have often imprisoned others?" said the Black.

"Then 'tis that miscreant Ellingham who has put me here!" exclaimed Bones, in a tone which showed that he was quivering with rage. "Demon!—fiend!—yes—you are Lord Ellingham—I thought I knew your voice, although you tried to disguise it. At the first moment I fancied—but that was stupid,—still it struck me that it was the voice of Tom Rain which spoke. Ha! ha!" the old wretch chuckled with horrible ferocity and savage glee—"I did for him—I did for him! I sent him to the scaffold—I got him hanged—and now he is food for worms! Ellingham—for I know you are Lord Ellingham—I can have the laugh at you, you devil, although you keep me here!"

"Miserable old man," said the Black, in a tone of deep pity, though still disguised in modulation,—"are you insensible to the whisperings of conscience?"

"Yes—now that you are here!" cried Benjamin Bones, his clothes rustling as if with the trembling

nervousness of enraged excitement. "You made me sell you these houses—you took them away from me by force, as it were; and now you keep me a prisoner here. It is all through vengeance that you do it—you who pretended to be above all thoughts or intentions of revenge!"

"As God is my judge, I harbour no such sentiment towards you!" said the Blackamoor, emphatically. "But will you converse tranquilly and calmly with me?"

"Well—I will try," returned Old Death. "What do you want to say to me?"

"To remind you that you are an old—very old man, and that you cannot hope to live much longer——"

"Fiend! would you kill me in cold blood!" interrupted Bones, in a sort of shrieking, yelling tone that indicated mingled alarm and rage.

"Had I intended to slay you, I might have done it when you were first brought here as my prisoner," answered the Black. "Rest satisfied on that head——"

"Then you do not mean to kill me?" exclaimed Old Death, with all the hysterical joy of a coward soul, in spite of his natural and still untamed ferocity.

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated the Blackamoor.

"There—now 'tis the voice of Tom Rain once again!" cried Old Death, evidently shuddering as he spoke. "But, no—I am a fool—you are the Earl! Yes—tell me—are you not the Earl of Ellingham?"

"No matter who I am," was the solemn reply. "If you ask me questions, I will immediately leave you."

"No—don't go for a few minutes!" exclaimed Old Death, imploringly. "I have been here a month,—yes—for I have counted the visits of your men, who come, as they tell me, every night to bring me food,—and I know that I have been here a month. In all that time I have only exchanged a dozen words with human beings—and—and—this solitude is horrible!"

"You have leisure to ponder on all your crimes," said the Black.

"Who made you my judge?" demanded Old Death, with a return of his ferocity of tone and manner. "If you want me to confess all my sins, and will then set me free, I will do it," he added in a somewhat ironical way.

"Confession is useless, without true repentance," observed the Blackamoor. "Besides, all your misdeeds are known to me,—your behaviour to your half-sister, Octavia Manners, years ago—your treatment of poor Jacob Smith—your machinations to destroy Thomas Rainford——"

"Then, by all this, am I convinced that you are the Earl of Ellingham!" cried Old Death. "Ah! my lord," he immediately added, in a voice which suddenly changed to a tone of earnest appeal, "do not keep me here any longer! Let me go—and I will leave London for ever! Reflect, my lord—I am an old man—a very old man,—you yourself said so just now,—and you are killing me by keeping me here. Send me out of the country—anywhere you choose, however distant—and I will thank you: but again I say, do not keep me here."

"When the savage animal goes about preying upon the weak and unwary, he should be placed under restraint," said the Blackamoor. "You are not repentant, Benjamin Bones! A month have you been here—a month have you been allowed to

ponder upon your enormities,—and still your soul is obdurate. Not many minutes have elapsed since you glorified in one of the most infamous deeds of your long and wicked life."

"I spoke of Tom RAIN to annoy you—because I was enraged with you for keeping me here," returned Old Death, hastily. "There have been moments," he added, after a short pause, "when I have felt sorry for what I did in that respect. I would not do so over again—no, my lord, I assure you I would not! I wish your poor half-brother was alive now—I would not seek to injure him, even if I had the power."

"You speak thus because you have been alone and in the dark," observed the Blackmoor, in a mournful voice:—"but were you restored to freedom—to the enjoyment of the light of God's own sun—and to the possession of the power of following your career of iniquity, you would again glory in that dreadful deed."

"No," answered Old Death: "I am sorry for it. I know that my nature is savage and ferocious: but will you tame me by cruelty? And your keeping me here is downright cruelty—and nothing more or less. It makes me vindictive—it makes me feel at times as if I hated you."

"I shall keep you here, nevertheless,—for some time longer,—aye, and in the dark," returned the Blackmoor: "because you seek not to subdue your revengeful feelings. It is terrible to think that so old a man should be so inveterately wicked. Do you know that your gang is broken up—rendered powerless? In the centre of this subterranean are Timothy Splint—Joshua Pedler—Mrs. Bunce and her husband—and your agent, Tidmarsh."

"Then I have no hope from without!" growled Old Death, his garments again rustling with a movement of savage impatience; and for an instant it struck the Blackmoor that he could see two ferocious eyes gleaming in the dark—but this was doubtless the mere fancy of the moment.

"Yes,—you are beyond the reach of human aid, unless by my will and consent," said the Blackmoor. "Your late companions or tools in iniquity are all housed safely here;—and, what is more, they are penitent. Listen for a moment, Benjamin Bones; and may the information I am about to give you prove an instructive lesson. Timothy Splint is at this instant reading the Bible, therein to search for hope and consolation, which God does not deny to the worst sinners when they are truly penitent. Joshua Pedler is occupying himself in writing a letter of advice to a young girl who became his mistress, whom he drove to prostitution, but who is now earning her livelihood in a respectable manner. Tidmarsh deplores the folly which made him your instrument; and he is reading good books. Bunce and his wife are together in the same dungeon; and the woman is rapidly yielding up to her husband that empire which she had usurped. They too regret that they ever knew you; and the Bible is their solace. Of six persons, whom I imprisoned in this place which was once your own property, five are already repentant; you, who are the sixth, alone remain obdurate and hardened."

"And my old friends curse me!" moaned the ancient miscreant, his voice seeming more hollow and sepulchral than ever, as if he were covering his face with his hands. "What—the people who owe so much to me—the Bunces—Tidmarsh—"

"Would not speak to you, unless it were to convert you," added the Black. "Thus, you perceive, you—who in the common course of nature, are of all the six the nearest to the threshold of the tomb,—you, who have so many years upon your head, and such deep and manifold crimes to expiate,—you, Benjamin Bones," continued the warning voice, "are the last to show the slightest—the faintest sign of penitence. Is not this deplorable? And even now you appear to regret that your late companions in crime should be in their hearts thus alienated from you. Doubtless you trusted to the chapter of accidents—to the hazard of chances to enable them to discover your place of imprisonment and effect your rescue?"

Old Death groaned heavily, in spite of himself.

"Yes:—such was your hope—such was your idea," resumed the Black; "and now you are unmanned by disappointment. Even your friend Jeffreys turned against you—he led you into the snare which I set for you—he will not raise an arm to save you from my power. He does not even know where you are."

"Then I am abandoned by all the world!" shrieked forth the wretched miscreant, unable to subdue the agonising emotions which this conviction excited within him.

"He who finds himself abandoned by all the world, should throw himself upon his Maker," said the Blackmoor.

"There—there—'tis the voice of RAINFORD again!" cried Old Death, evidently seized with ineffable terror. "But, no—no—you are the Earl of Ellingham—you must be the Earl! Yet why do you every now and then imitate the tone of Tom RAIN? Is it to frighten me, my lord? Tell me—is it to frighten me?"

"You seem insensible to fear of any kind," answered the Black,—"I mean a fear which may be permanent and salutary. You have occasional qualms of conscience, which you cannot altogether resist, but which almost immediately pass away. Have you no wish to make your peace with heaven? Would you pray with a clergyman, were one to visit you?"

"No:—I am unfit for prayer—I should not have the patience to stand the questioning of a clergyman," answered Old Death hastily; then, almost immediately afterwards, he said, "But I was wrong to give such a reply! Yes—send me a clergyman—let him bring a light—do anything to relieve me from this solitude and this darkness. My lord—for I know that you are the Earl of Ellingham—pray take compassion upon me! I am an old—a very old man, my lord; and I cannot endure this confinement. I told you just now that I was sorry for what I did to your brother-in-law; and you know that I cannot recall him to life. Neither will you do so by killing me. Have mercy upon me, then, my lord: let me leave this horrible place—"

"To enter the great world again, and renew your course of crime?" interrupted the Black. "No—Benjamin Bones, that may not be! Let me first become assured that you sincerely and truly repent of your misdeeds—let me be impressed with the conviction that you are sorry for the crimes which have marked your long life,—and then—then we will speak of ameliorating your condition. For the present, do not consider me as your enemy—do not look upon me as a man acting towards you from

vindictive motives only. No;—for were I inclined to vent on you a miserable spite or a fiendish malignity, the means are not deficient. I might keep you without food for days together—but each day your provender is renewed; or I might even kill you outright—and yet I would not violently injure a hair of your head! To-morrow evening I will visit you again: in the meantime endeavour to subdue your feelings so that you may then speak to me without irritation.”

With these words the Black abruptly thrust the door open, and quitted the dungeon; but at that instant Cæsar, who had been pacing up and down with Wilton in the immediate vicinity of that particular cell, was so close to the entrance that the light of the lamp which he carried in his hand streamed full upon the countenance of his master as the latter sprang from the deep darkness of Old Death's prison-house.

The glare for a moment showed the interior of the dungeon; and the Black, mechanically turning his eyes towards the place where he presumed Benjamin Bones to be, caught a rapid glimpse of the hideous old man, seated—or rather crouched on his bed, his hands clasped round his knees, and his form so arched that his knees and chin almost appeared to meet.

In another instant the dungeon-door was closed violently by the Blackamoor, who, as he locked and barred it, said in a low and somewhat reproachful tone to Cæsar, “You should not have been so incautious as to throw the light upon me just as I was leaving the cell. Old Death had time, even in that single moment during which the glare flashed upon my countenance, to observe me distinctly.”

“I am truly sorry, sir, that I should have been so imprudent,” answered Cæsar, in a tone of vexation at his fault. “But it is impossible that he could recognise you.”

“I believe so,” observed the Black; “and therefore we will say no more upon the subject. The old man remains obdurate and hardened,” he continued, still speaking in a low whisper; “and yet I have hopes of him as well as of the others.”

Wilton supplied Benjamin Bones with provisions through the trap in his dungeon-door; and the party then quitted the subterranean by the mode of egress communicating with the house in Red Lion Street, Clerkenwell—for the reader now perceives, as indeed he may long ago have conjectured, that the Black's dwelling was established in the quarters lately tenanted by Old Death.

CHAPTER CXI.

A CONVERSATION.

PASS we over another month—eight weeks having now elapsed since the six prisoners were first consigned to their dungeons, and four weeks from the date of those visits the description of which has occupied the two preceding chapters.

It was between nine and ten o'clock in the evening; and the Blackamoor was seated in his apartment, looking over some letters, when Cæsar ushered in Dr. Lascelles.

“Good evening, my dear sir,” said the Blackamoor, shaking the worthy physician cordially by

the hand. “Be seated—and Cæsar will bring us a bottle of that claret which you so much admire. I am delighted that you have at length found time to give me an hour or two, in order that I may enter into full and complete explanations of certain matters——”

“I understand—I understand,” interrupted the doctor, good humouredly. “Your theory has proved to me more practical than I expected: but I shall not say any more about it until you have given me all the details of its progress. And before you begin, I must observe that the case which took me out of town six weeks ago, and has kept at Brighton all the time, has ended most satisfactorily. I have effected a complete cure.”

“I am delighted to hear tidings so glorious from you, doctor,” said the Black. “A case which had baffled all the physicians who had previously been concerned in it, is now conducted to a successful issue by yourself. It will wondrously and deservedly increase your reputation, great as that fame already was.”

“My dear friend,” replied the physician, “without for a moment seeking to recall anything unpleasant connected with the past, I must inform you that galvanism was the secret of the grand cure which I have effected. But let us pass on to another subject,” exclaimed the doctor hastily, as if considerably turning the discourse from a disagreeable topic. “I have been absent for six weeks—quite a strange thing for me, who am so wedded to London; and you are one of the very first of my friends on whom I call. All day long I have been paying hurried visits to my patients; and now I come to sit a couple of hours with you. I suppose you have plenty of news for me?”

“None of any consequence beyond the sphere of my own affairs in this place,” answered the Black. “You are of course aware that the Earl has made Esther an offer of his hand——”

“To be sure, my dear friend,” interrupted Lascelles: “that engagement was contracted, you remember, two or three weeks before I left London, when summoned to Brighton. But I presume that the Earl is still ignorant of——”

“All my proceedings?” exclaimed the Black, finishing the sentence for the physician. “Yes—he remains completely in the dark respecting everything. The time may, however, soon come when he shall be made acquainted with all; and then I do not think he will blame me.”

“Far from it!” cried Lascelles, emphatically: “he doubtless owes you his happiness, if not his life—for there is no telling what that miscreant, Old Death, might not have done to gratify his frightful cravings for vengeance. The monster!” exclaimed the physician, indignantly: “he would even have inflicted the most terrible outrages and wrongs upon the amiable Esther and the generous-souled Lady Hatfield, in order to wound the heart of the Earl.”

“And yet I do not despair of reforming that man, bad as he is,” observed the Black.

“Reform the Devil!” cried the doctor. “But I will not anticipate by any hasty opinion of mine the explanations which you are going to give me. By the bye, have you had any intelligence relative to that Mr. Torrens?”

“Yes,” answered the Black. “Esther received a letter from his daughter Rosomond a few days ago. The poor girl and her father were on their way to Switzerland, where they intended to settle

in some secluded spot. The old gentleman is worn down and spirit-broken; and Rosomond states that she is afraid he is oppressed with some secret care beyond those with which she is acquainted."

"And your man Jeffreys?" said Lascelles, interrogatively.

"The next time you visit Hackney, doctor,—should your professional avocations take you to that suburb," replied the Blackamoor, "forget not to look out for the most decent grocer's shop in Mare Street; and over the door you will see the name of JOHN JEFFREYS. He entered the establishment only a few days ago; and I believe he is a reformed man. I tried his fidelity as well as his steadiness in many ways, during the last two months; and I have every reason to entertain the best hopes relative to him. At all events, he has every chance of earning an honest and good living; for he has purchased an old-established business, which Wilton previously ascertained to be a profitable concern."

"Have you heard or seen anything lately of our friend Sir Christopher Blunt?" inquired the physician, laughing as he spoke.

"I have not seen him since that memorable night when he fulfilled the duties of a magistrate in this room," answered the Black, smiling; "but I have occasionally heard of him. He is so puffed up with pride in consequence of the importance which he derived from his adventure here, that he looks upon himself as a perfect demigod. By the bye, I saw an advertisement in this day's papers, announcing the speedy publication of the '*The Life and Times of Sir Christopher Blunt. By Jeremiah Lykspittal, Esq. With numerous Portraits; and containing a mass of interesting correspondence between the Subject of the Biography and the most Eminent Deceased Men of the present Century.*' So ran the advertisement."

"At which you of course laughed heartily," exclaimed the doctor. "But here is Caesar, with the wine—and long enough he has been in fetching it up, too."

The lad made some excuse, placed the decanters and glasses on the table, and then withdrew.

"Now for the promised explanations, my friend," cried the physician, as he helped himself to the purple juice of Bordeaux.

"First," began the Blackamoor, "I shall speak to you of the six prisoners generally—or rather of my system, as applied to them. My belief originally was that bad men should become to a certain extent the reformers of themselves through the medium of their own thoughts. It is not sufficient, I reasoned within myself, that criminals should be merely placed each night in a situation to think and reflect and then enjoy the light of the glorious day again. A night's meditations may be poignant and provocative of a remorse of a salutary kind: but when the day dawns, the mind becomes hardened again, and all disagreeable reflections fly away. The most guilty wretches fear not spectres in the daytime: 'tis in the darkness and silence of the night that phantoms haunt them. In a word, then, the natural night is not long enough to make an impression so deep that the ensuing day can not easily obliterate it."

"Good!" exclaimed the physicians: "I follow you attentively."

"These considerations," resumed the Black, "led me to the conclusion that a wicked man's thoughts could only be rendered available as a means to in-

duce sincere repentance and excite a permanent remorse, by extending their train to a long, long period. If a night of a few short hours' duration would produce a very partial and limited effect upon the mind of a criminal, I reasoned—why not make a night of many weeks, and hope for a proportionately grand and striking result? Accordingly, I resolved to subject those six prisoners to the test; and I will now give you a detailed account of the consequences."

"Proceed," said the physician: "I am becoming deeply interested."

"The six prisoners were each placed in a separate cell, and not allowed any light in the first instance," continued the Blackamoor. "Each dungeon was plainly but comfortably furnished; and every evening they were supplied with a sufficiency of food for four-and-twenty hours. They were ordered to perform their ablutions regularly under pain of having their meat stopped; and you may be sure that they did not fail to obey the command. Twice a week the men were shaved by one of my people; and twice a week also they were supplied with clean linen. The woman was of course provided with additional changes; and as her health was more likely to suffer than that of the men, I allowed her to walk up and down the long subterranean for two hours each day, watched by Wilton so that she might not communicate with either of the prisoners. But I am now about to enter on details connected with each individual."

The physician drew his chair a little closer to the Black.

"Tidmarsh was the first who showed any signs of contrition," resumed the latter. "He could not endure that one, long, endless night into which I had plunged him,—a night interrupted only by the short and regular visits of myself and my people. He was ever alone with his own thoughts, which no intervals of a long day broke in upon: the impression created by his thoughts was over in his mind—the continuous night kept that impression there! By degrees he began to see the error of his ways—and, when his thoughts were on one occasion intolerable, and his imagination was filled with frightful images, he had recourse to prayer. The next time I visited him he assured me that his prayers had relieved him, but that he could not sufficiently settle his mind to pray so often as he desired. That was the moment to give this man a light, and I did so. At the same time I offered him his choice between the Bible and a Tale-book; and he chose the former with unaffected readiness. Had he selected the latter, I should have seen that he craved for amusement only—and he would have had neither lamp nor books until he had gone through a farther ordeal of his lonely thoughts in utter darkness. Well—this Tidmarsh, by the aid of the light, was enabled to study the Bible and settle his soul to prayer. But a continual and unvaried perusal of the Bible is calculated to render the mind morbid, and convert a sinner into a grossly superstitious fanatic. Accordingly, when I saw that Tidmarsh began to grow gloomy—which was in a very few days—I gave him books of Travels and Voyages; and his soul was refreshed by the change. The improvement in that man was far more rapid than I could have possibly anticipated. During my visits to him, I tested his sincerity in a variety of ways,—by means of questions so artfully contrived as to admit of two kinds

of answers: namely, one kind hypocritical, and the other sincere—and at the same time implying a sort of promise of release if the hypocritical reply were given. But I found him straightforward and truly conscientious in his answers. In due time I allowed him such novels as *'The Vicar of Wakefield,' 'Paul and Virginia,' 'Elizabeth, or the Exiles of Siberia,'* to read: but I found that he preferred the Travels, Voyages, and Biographies of great and good men. Indeed, scarcely six weeks had elapsed from the date of that man's incarceration in the dungeon, when I felt convinced that he was so far a reformed character as to be anxious to earn an honest livelihood if he were only afforded the chance. Then I removed him from his dungeon, and lodged him in a room up stairs. He was still in reality a prisoner, because any attempt to escape on his part would have been immediately detected—so narrowly yet secretly was he watched. To him, however, it must have seemed that he was free: but he never evinced the least inclination to avail himself of the apparent liberty which he enjoyed. Every circumstance spoke in that man's favour; and the night before last he was sent off, in company with one of my dependants, to Portsmouth, whence they embarked together for the island of Alderney, where Tidmarsh is to settle in a small way of business, to establish which the means will be found him. My retainer will remain for a few weeks—or perhaps months—so as thoroughly to watch his conduct; and if during that period, and in a place where there are no evil temptations, he manifests an uniform steadiness of conduct, I think we may safely calculate that there is no fear of a relapse."

"And all this has been effected in two short months!" exclaimed the physician, with a tone and manner indicative of mingled surprise and admiration. "I could scarcely have believed it possible."

"Listen to my next case, doctor," said the Black; "and you will see that my system is most salutary. I shall speak of the two Bunces collectively. The man Bunce I always looked upon rather as a soft-pated, hen-pecked fool than a radically wicked fellow; and accordingly, the moment he began to exhibit very serious alarm and horror at being alone and in the dark, I gave him a lamp and the Bible. The length of night which I made him endure was not more than two-thirds of a week. In respect to his wife, the first demonstration of repentance which she showed, was in a desire to speak to her husband if only for a few minutes and through the trap-door of his cell. Of course I issued orders that the request should be complied with; and it was evident that the woman derived comfort from this indulgence. Next day she was permitted to converse with him at the trap-door for nearly half an hour; and then she was overheard begging his pardon for the ill-treatment which he had so often endured at her hands. For many, many successive days this short intercourse was allowed them; and on one occasion, Toby Bunce read her a few verses from the Bible, he being in his cell with the lamp, and she standing outside his door in the dark subterranean passage. The manner in which she received the passage thus read to her, induced me to order that she also should be provided with a light and a Testament; for the night which she endured, and which could scarcely be said to have been even interrupted by the daily walk in the dark passage,

was just *three weeks*. It gave me pain, doctor—oh! it gave me pain, I can assure, to punish that woman so severely; but her mind was very obdurate—her heart very hardened;—and darkness was long before it produced on her the effect which I desired. At length, a few days after she had been allowed a lamp,—and a little more than one month ago—I yielded to her earnest entreaties that she might be lodged with her husband. Then what a change had taken place in her! She was tamed—completely tamed,—no longer a vixenish shrew, but questioning her husband mildly and in a conciliating tone relative to the passages of the Bible, or the Travels and other instructive books, which he had read to her. Good feelings appeared to establish themselves rapidly between this couple. I had put them to several tests. On one occasion Wilton persuaded Toby Bunce that he was not looking very well, and some little luxury was added to the evening's supply of food, it being intimated that the extra dish was expressly for himself. Wilton remained near the cell, and listened to what passed within. Bunce insisted upon sharing the delicacy with his wife; and she would not hear of such a proposal. He urged his offer—she was positive; and in this point she once again showed a resolution of her own, but not in a manner to give her husband offence. The very next day—this was a week ago—I had the pair removed to a chamber over-head, giving them the same apparent chance of escape as in the case of Tidmarsh. They did not however seek to avail themselves of it; and yesterday evening they were separated again—but only for a short time. In fact, Bunce was last night sent off to Southampton, in company with one of my people; and thence they doubtless embarked for the island of Sark this morning. Mrs. Bunce will leave presently, guarded by my faithful dependant Harding and his wife, who will not only take her to rejoin her husband in the little islet opposite Guernsey, but will also stay with them there for a period of six months. Bunce will follow his trade as a tailor, Harding finding a market for the clothes which he makes in St. Peter's Port, which is the capital of Guernsey, as you are well aware."

"So far, so good," exclaimed the physician, highly delighted with these explanations. "Should your system produce results permanently beneficial, you may become a great benefactor to the human race; for it is assuredly far better to reform the wicked by a course of a few weeks' training by playing upon their feelings in this manner, than to subject them to the contamination of a felons' gaol and inflict years of exile under circumstances which are utterly repugnant to all hopes of reformation. But pray answer me one question. Should either of these Bunces, or Tidmarsh choose to resist the control and authority of your dependants who have charge of them at present—and should any one of those quasi-prisoners demand their unconditional freedom—how can you men exercise a power or sway over them?"

"These quasi-prisoners, as you term them," answered the Black, "have not, as a matter of course, the least idea who I really am. Their minds, somewhat attenuated by their incarceration and all the mysterious circumstances of their captivity, are to a certain extent over-awed. They know that they have been, and still believe themselves to be, in the power of one who wields an authority which they cannot comprehend; and fear

alone, if no better motive, therefore renders them tractable. This ensures their obedience and their silence at least for the present. Eventually, when they again become accustomed to freedom, they will find themselves placed in a position to earn an honest and very comfortable livelihood—care being taken to keep alive in their minds the conviction that the business which produces them their bread and enables them to live respectably, only remains their own so long as they prove worthy of enjoying its advantages. Now my calculations and beliefs are these:—People who have entered upon a course of crime, continue in it because it is very difficult, and often impossible, to leave it for honest pursuits. But when once they have experienced the dreadful effects of crime, and are placed in a way to act and labour honestly, very few indeed would by choice relapse into evil courses. Therefore, I conclude and hope that the Bunces on the one hand, and Tidmarsh on the other, will, if from mere motives of policy and convenience alone, steadily continue in that honest path in which they are now placed, and the advantages of which they will soon experience."

"Good again," said the doctor. "If your calculations only applied to six criminals out of ten, you would be effecting an immense good by means of your system. But I hope and indeed am inclined to believe that the proportion in your favour is even larger."

"I am certain that it is," answered the Blackamoor. "Well, I now come to Timothy Splint—the man, who, as you may remember, was the actual assassin of Sir Henry Courtenay."

"If you succeed in redeeming that fellow," exclaimed the physician, "I shall say that your system can have no exceptions. Stay, though!" he cried, thought striking him;—"I had forgotten Old Death. Ah! my dear friend, you may as well endeavour to tame the bon-consistor, as to reform that dreadful man."

"You shall hear of him in his turn," said the Black, his tone assuming a slight degree of mournfulness, as if he were less satisfied in respect to the applications of his system to Old Death, than in either of the other cases. "For the present," he observed, "you must have patience enough to listen to certain details relative to Timothy Splint."

"Go on, my dear friend," cried Dr. Lascelles. "I am all attention—and patience too, for that matter. Your narrative is too interesting to be tedious."

"Timothy Splint," continued the Blackamoor, "appeared to suffer more horribly from the darkness than all the others. The spectre of the murdered baronet was constantly by his side, and even prevented him from committing self-destruction. For a whole month did his *night* continue; and during that period he must have endured the most frightful mental tortures. This was all the better: such a state of mind naturally drove the man to pray:—and prayer relieved him. I remember how touchingly, although in his rude style, he assured me one evening that when he preyed the spectre grew less and less. Now, notwithstanding I was well pleased to find him in this frame of mind, I did not choose to encourage superstitious notions: and therefore I explained to him that the only apparitions which existed were those that were conjured up by a guilty conscience. At the expiration of, I think, exactly thirty-one days, I allowed this man a light and a

Bible. Then I pursued the same treatment with him as in respect to Tidmarsh and the Bunces: I now, I gave him books of Travels and Voyages and moral Tales. He seemed very grateful—not only seemed, but really was; and his hard heart was melted by my kind treatment. A few days ago, he gave me the outlines of his early life; and I found that circumstances had driven him into the ways of crime. His reformation was, therefore, all the easier; because he had a youth of innocence to look back upon and regret. He moreover assured me that even with his late companion in crime, Josh Pedler, he had frequently spoken, in mournful mood, of the unhappiness which often marks the hours of men of lawless character; and all these circumstances tended to give strength and consistency to his declarations that he longed—deeply longed to have an opportunity of earning an honest livelihood for the future. What to do with him I scarcely knew. Whenever I reflected on this subject, I remembered that he was a murderer—stained with the blood of a fellow-creature; and his case was therefore widely different from that of the Bunces and Tidmarsh. At length it struck me that emigration to a far-distant land was the only fitting course to adopt; and I proposed it to him. He was rejoiced at the idea; for he instantly saw how, by changing his name, and commencing the world anew in another sphere, he should be removed from old haunts where either unpleasant reminiscences would be awakened, or temptations present themselves. Moreover, he beheld the necessity of repairing to some part of the earth where he stood no chance of being recognised by either friend or foe. His consent to my proposed arrangement being thus obtained, and all his best hopes and feelings being warmly enlisted in the plan, I had then to ascertain whether any one of my dependants would consent to accompany such a man on a long voyage and to a far-off clime. Fortunately my enquiries amongst my retainers were followed by success; and at a very early hour this morning Timothy Splint and his guardian, or rather companion, set off for Liverpool, thence to embark for the United States. There, in the backwoods of the Far West, let us hope that this man—this murderer, whom the savage law would have *hanged*,"—and the Blackamoor shuddered, as he pronounced the word,—*"let us hope, I say, that Timothy Splint will some day rise into a substantial farmer, and that he may yet live to bless the period when he went through the ordeal of the subterranean dungeon."*

The Black paused, and drank a glass of the cooling claret; for his mouth had grown parched by the simple fact of giving utterance to *that one word* on which he had shudderingly laid so great an emphasis. The physician, who appeared to guess full well what was passing in his mind, made no remark; and in a few minutes the other continued his explanations in the ensuing manner:—

"I now come to Joshua Pedler. His disposition is naturally savage and brutal; and a *long night of darkness* produced on him effects which varied at different periods. His thoughts were dreadful to him; and sometimes, when I visited him, he would at first speak ferociously. But a kind word on my part immediately reduced him to meekness. He had not been many days in the dungeon when, doubtless encouraged by my manner towards him, he told me that he was not only unhappy on his own account, but also on that of a young woman



whom he had married according to the rights of the vile class with which he had so long herded. I immediately undertook to provide for the girl; and Pedler really demonstrated a sincere gratitude. You need scarcely be told that I kept my promise. Wilton sought her out; and she was found in a state of starvation and despair. A comfortable lodging was taken for her; and when she was somewhat restored to health, needle-work was supplied her. But all this was done without allowing her to believe that any other circumstance beyond a mere accidental discovery of her wretched condition had thus rendered her the object of Wilton's charity. The assurance which I gave Pedler that Matilda was provided for, had a most salutary effect upon his mind; although he frequently afterwards showed signs of savage impatience. The tenour of his thoughts was chiefly a regret that he had been so foolish as to pursue an evil career. He reproached himself for the folly of his wickedness, rather than for the wickedness itself. He disliked solitude and darkness, but was not so much influenced by fears as his late companion, Splint. During the first month he remained in darkness, and never once spoke to me of prayer. Two or three times he al-

luded to the Bible, but did not express a wish to read it. At last he admitted to me his conviction that the thoughts which oppressed him were beneficial to him, though most unpleasant. I fancied this to be a favourable opportunity to test his worthiness to receive some indulgence. I accordingly asked him if he would like to be able to write to Matilda. My calculation was just: I had touched him in a vulnerable point;—and he was that night allowed a lamp and writing-materials. Moreover, on that very occasion, he shed tears; and I no longer despaired of taming the last remnants of ferocity which lingered in his nature. A few days afterwards he gave me a letter to send to Matilda. Of course I opened and read it; for it was to obtain a precise insight into the real state of his mind that I had suggested the correspondence with his mistress. The contents of that document confirmed the hopes I already entertained of him; and I saw that his affection for that young woman might be made a most humanizing means in respect to him. I accordingly had her brought into this house, and lodged in one of the attics. Then I broke to her as gently as possible the fact that Joshua Pedler was my prisoner. I shall not pause to describe her joy

at receiving intelligence concerning him; suffice it to say that she read his letter with tearful eyes, and gladly consented to reply to it. In the evening I took her answer to the prisoner; and he wept over it like a child. I then knew that his reformation was a certainty. Two or three days afterwards, he begged me to allow him a Bible; and his request was of course complied with. The correspondence that passed between him and Matilda was frequent and lively; and that he might feel himself under no restraint, I assured him that I neither saw his letters nor his replies. 'T was a falsehood on my part—but a necessary, and therefore an innocent one. For I *did* peruse all this correspondence; and Matilda was aware of the fact by which I was enabled to watch the gradual but sudden change that was taking place in the mind of that man. At length I perceived that I might in safety think of providing for him elsewhere; and I was as much embarrassed how to accomplish this aim, as I was in the case of Timothy Splint. But in the midst of my bewilderment I happened to notice an advertisement in a daily newspaper, stating that by a particular day two men, or a man and his wife, were required to undertake the care of Eddystone Light-house. You may start with surprise, doctor—you may even smile; but I assure you that this advertisement appeared most providentially to concur with the object I had in view. Without a moment's delay I spoke to Matilda respecting the matter; and she expressed her readiness to follow my advice in all things, so long as there was a prospect of her being reunited to Josh Pedler. Her consent being procured, it was no difficult task to obtain that of the man. On the contrary, he accepted the proposal with joy and thankfulness. Wilton soon made the necessary enquiries and arrangements; and at this moment Joshua Pedler and the young woman are the sole inmates of the Eddystone Light-house!"

"Thus, my dear friend," said the physician, counting the names of the persons upon his fingers, "you have disposed of Tidmarsh in Alderney—the Bunces are to go to Sark—Splint is bound as an emigrant to the Far West—and Joshua Pedler is on the Eddystone rock."

"And Pedler is the only one who is unaccompanied by an agent of mine," observed the Black: "because Matilda is a good young woman; and I can rely upon her. Moreover I should tell you that I procured a license for them; and Wilton saw them legally married at Plymouth, before they embarked for the Light-house."

"I congratulate you upon the success of your projects thus far," said the physician. "It is truly wonderful how admirably you have managed thus to redeem and satisfactorily dispose of some of the greatest villains that ever lurked in the low dens of this metropolis. But now, my friend, I wish to hear something of that arch-miscreant, Old Death."

At this moment the door opened; and one of the Black's dependants entered the room.

"The woman Bunco, sir" he said, "is most anxious to communicate something to you before she quits London. She declares that she has a secret preying upon her mind——"

"A secret?" exclaimed the Black.

"Yes, sir—a secret which she says she must reveal to you, as it is too heavy for her heart to bear."

She cried a great deal, and implored me to come to you."

"Doctor," said the Blackamoor, after a few moments' profound reflection, "you know wherefore I do not wish that woman to behold my features—even though they be thus disguised. During her incarceration I never spoke to her save through the trap of her dungeon door; and since she has been an inmate of the house I have not visited her. It will be as well to continue this precaution: do you, then, hasten to her and receive the confession, whatever it be, which she has to make."

"Willingly, replied Lascelles; and he followed the servant from the room."

CHAPTER CXII.

THE CONVERSATION CONCLUDED.

UPWARDS of a quarter of an hour had elapsed, when Dr. Lascelles returned to the apartment in which he had left the Blackamoor.

"Yes," exclaimed the physician, throwing himself into the chair which he had recently occupied; "that woman is indeed penitent—truly penitent!"

"What proof have you acquired of this fact, doctor?" demanded the Black.

"The confession which she has just made to me—or rather the motive which induced her to make it," answered Lascelles. "But not to keep you in suspense, my dear friend, she has revealed something which only confirms a suspicion that you yourself had long ago entertained, if I remember right."

"And that suspicion——"

"Is relative to Jacob Smith," added Lascelles.

"Ah! the woman has confessed it!" exclaimed the Blackamoor.

"She has confessed that Jacob Smith is her own son, and that Benjamin Bones is his father," replied the physician, in a solemn tone.

"My God! what a parent that man has been!" cried the Black, his brows contracting, and his voice indicating the emotions of horror that were suddenly excited within him. "When I recall to mind every detail of the history of poor Jacob,—his neglected infancy—his corrupted youth,—when I reflect that his own father was the individual who coolly and deliberately initiated him in the ways of crime—Just heavens! I begin to think with you that the reformation of such a monster is an impossibility!"

"Subdue your excitement, my dear friend," said the doctor; "and let us converse calmly and reasonably upon these matters."

"First, then, explain to me the nature of your interview with Mrs. Bunce," observed the Black. "I shall listen with earnest attention."

"I went up stairs to the room in which she is located," said Lascelles; "and she rose from a chair the moment I entered; but she started back in evident disappointment mingled with surprise when she saw me. 'It was not you, sir,' she almost immediately observed, 'that I wanted to see. I know that the master of this house is of dark complexion; for I have caught a glimpse of him when he has visited my dungeon below.'—I explained to her that I was a friend of your's, and that you had deputed me to receive any confession which she had to make. She appeared to hesitate for a moment, and then burst

into tears. *"I have been wicked—very wicked, sir,"* she said, in a voice broken by deep sobs; *"and it is only very lately that I have had my eyes opened to my sinful life. The dark gentleman, who I suppose is the master here, has done this good thing for me: and now he is going to provide for me and my husband. But I shall not go away happy, unless I tell him every thing that weighs on my soul."*—I spoke a few words of comfort to her; and in a few minutes she confessed that the lad who bore the name of Jacob Smith is her own son, born while she was the mistress of Old Death, and before her marriage with Bunce. I informed her that Jacob was well provided for and happy; and she seemed deeply grateful for this assurance. Then I recommended her not to reveal this secret to her husband when they should be united again; inasmuch as, having entered on a new phase of existence together, it would be useless and wrong to acquaint him with a fact calculated only to disturb that harmony. She promised to follow my advice, and appeared much eased in mind by having unburdened her secret to me.

"You gave her most excellent counsel, doctor," said the Black: then, after a few moments' reflection, he added, "Jacob ought not to be informed of this secret of his hideous parentage—at least not for the present."

"By no means!" exclaimed the physician. "His mind is tranquil—he feels a certain confidence in himself—and your friendship is his greatest delight. Let not that salutary equanimity be disturbed."

"No—it would be wrong and useless," said the Black, musing. "I remember that in the course of the long narrative which he gave me of his life, he mentioned the occasional scintillations of kindness which marked the conduct of Mrs. Bunce towards him. I also recollect that he observed to me how there were moments when he thought a great deal of any gentle words which she ever uttered to him, or any kind treatment she ever showed him."

"Nature, my dear friend—Nature!" exclaimed the good physician. "Even in a woman so bad as she was at the time of which he spoke, there were certain natural yearnings which she could not altogether subdue; while, on his part, there existed filial inclinations and tendencies which he could not understand. How much that villain Benjamin Bones has to answer for!"

"Alas—alas! I fear that he is beyond redemption!" cried the Black, bitterly. "But—no," he added immediately afterwards, in a changed and more decided tone: "we must not despair!"

"I am now anxiously waiting to hear your report concerning him," observed Lascelles.

"He is still in darkness—his night still continues," was the answer. "A month has elapsed since I visited him for the first time in his dungeon; and during the other four weeks that have subsequently passed, I have had several interviews with him in the same manner. These interviews have taken place in the utter obscurity of his cell; and I have been constrained, though with pain and difficulty, to assume a feigned tone on each of those occasions. At my first visit he declared, in terror and amazement, that he recognised in my voice something which reminded him of that of Thomas Rainford; and then he seemed to be impressed with the conviction that I was the Earl of Ellingham. His rage against the Earl was deep and terrible; and I saw too plainly that if he relapsed into a milder tone, it

was but to deceive me as to the real state of his mind, and induce me to grant him some indulgences—if not his freedom. I visited him again on the following night; and he spoke less savagely, and more meekly: but I mistrusted him—yes, I mistrusted him, and I fear with good grounds. I cannot give you a very satisfactory description of our subsequent meetings. At one moment he has appeared touched by my language, and has even expressed penitence and contrition for the past: at the next moment, he has exhibited all the natural ferocity of his disposition. Sometimes he has assumed a coaxing manner, and has endeavoured to move me to grant him a light;—but I have hitherto refused. One thing I must not forget to mention—which is that never since the first visit I paid him has he once alluded to the impression made upon him by the sounds of my voice; and never has he again addressed me as Lord Ellingham. In moments of excitement or rage, he has demanded in a wild and almost frantic tone who I am: but seldom waiting for the reply, he has relapsed either into a humour of stubborn taciturnity, or of a meekness which I knew to be assumed. Indeed, there are many points in his character and conduct, since he has been an inmate of the dungeon, which I cannot comprehend. It is however certain that darkness has not produced on him the same rapid and important effects as upon the other five: something more severe in the shape of punishment, or something better calculated to touch his heart and appeal to his feelings, is requisite. At the same time, I believe him to be already moved and shaken in his obduracy to a certain degree: but reformation in respect to him must be a work of time."

"On the whole, you have hopes?" said the physician, interrogatively.

"Yes—when I call to memory all the particulars of his conduct and language from the first occasion of my visits until the last, which took place yesterday, I can recognise a change," answered the Black. "Indeed, I am almost convinced that if it were possible for me to speak to him at very great length—to argue with him on the folly and wickedness of his past life—to reason with him unrestrainedly, I should be able to move him deeply. But the necessity of maintaining an assumed tone, and the impossibility of taking a light with me so as to watch the changings and workings of his countenance and follow up those appeals or those arguments which appear to have most effect with him,—in a word, the disguise I am compelled to sustain and the precautions I am forced to adopt, militate considerably against my system in respect to him."

"It would be imprudent for me to visit him on your behalf," observed the physician. "On that memorable night when Lord Ellingham had him, Tidmarsh, and Mrs. Bunce, in his power in an adjacent room, and wrested from them all the secrets of their damnable plots and schemes,—on that occasion, you know, I was present; and Old Death would therefore cherish only rancorous feelings with regard to me."

"True," said the Black, musing: then, suddenly starting from a deep reverie of a few minutes, he exclaimed, "Doctor, I have thought of a plan which I hope and trust, for the honour of human nature, may prove efficacious in respect to that obdurate sinner: but I hesitate—yes, I hesitate to put it into execution!"

"Explain yourself, my dear friend," replied Lascelles; "and I will give you my advice candidly and frankly."

"In a word, then, doctor," continued the Blackamoor, "I have such faith in the irresistible persuasion of woman, that I am half inclined to conjure Esther de Medina to assist me in this good work. Would she but consent to visit this great siner—or rather to address him through the sliding-panel of his dungeon door, I am certain that her eloquence, aided by the musical tones of her voice and the deep feeling which would characterize her language,—I am certain, I say, that she would succeed in touching a chord in his heart, which no words—no appeal of mine can reach."

The physician heard with attention, and began to reflect profoundly.

"For my part," continued the Blackamoor, "I believe that the eloquence of woman, when rightly used and properly directed, is endowed with an influence and a power almost irresistible. Woman's mission is to tame and humanize the ferocity of man's disposition; and the more antagonistic are the characters of two beings of opposite sexes thus to be brought in contact with each other, the better for the purpose. Now, decidedly no two living creatures can be more dissimilar in all respects than Benjamin Bones and Esther de Medina,—the former so savage and unrelenting; the latter so mild and forgiving,—the one possessing a soul blackened by every possible crime; the other endowed with every virtue that approximates the nature of woman to that of the angel!"

"I like your project—I see not the least objection to it, my dear friend," said Dr. Lascelles, after a long pause, during which he pondered deeply on the plan suggested. "Do you think that Miss de Medina would consent to aid you in this matter?"

"I have no doubt of it," returned the Black. "You perceive that the dilemma is somewhat serious, and not slightly embarrassing. I cannot allow Benjamin Bones to go forth again into the world, to recommence his vile intrigues; besides, to give him his liberty thus, would be to defeat the primary object which I had in view in breaking up his gang. To release him at present is therefore impossible; and I scarcely feel myself justified in keeping him locked up much longer in a dark dungeon. It would be unsafe to remove him into one of the apartments of either this house or that in Turnmill Street; for such a crafty fox can alone be kept secure by massive stone walls and iron bolts. What, then, am I to do with him?—how am I to dispose of him? Esther will assist me in this difficulty; and God send that through her agency, some salutary impression may be made upon Old Death's mind!"

"Bear in memory," exclaimed the physician, an idea suddenly striking him, "that one of this man's horrible schemes was to avenge himself on Lord Eillingham by torturing Esther de Medina."

"And when he hears her sweet voice revealing to him her knowledge of his atrocious designs, and sincerely promising him her pardon,—when he discovers how much virtue and goodness there is in woman," continued the Black, in an impassioned tone, "he will be moved—he will be led to contemplate the blackness of his own heart—he will find himself placed in such frightful contrast with that forgiving angel—"

"Yes—yes!" cried the physician, emphatically: "it must be done! You have devised the only means to produce a real and effectual impression on that bad man's heart; and if he prove inaccessible to the power of Esther's tongue, his case may be looked upon as hopeless."

The deep-toned bell of Clerkenwell church now struck the hour of eleven; and scarcely had the sound died away in the silence of night, when a port-chaise drove up to the door of the house.

"Mrs. Bunco is now about to take her departure," said the Black. "Every thing is prepared in that respect—Harding and his wife have already received full instructions and the necessary funds—and the sooner that the woman is safe out of this mighty city of temptation, the better."

The sounds of several footsteps were now heard descending the stairs; and a minute afterwards, the post-chaise drove rapidly away from the house.

"Of all my prisoners, Old Death alone remains to be disposed of," observed the Black, as soon as the din of the wheels was no longer audible.

"And it is to be hoped that he will not be a source of difficulty or embarrassment to you for many weeks more," said the physician, rising to take his departure.

CHAPTER CXIII.

ESTHER DE MEDINA AND OLD DEATH.

It was on the third day after the explanations given to Dr. Lascelles, and between five and six o'clock in the evening, that Esther de Medina was conducted by the Blackamoor into the subterranean passage, the latter holding a lamp in his hand.

"Shall I remain near you, Esther?" he enquired, in a whisper.

"No—it is not necessary," she answered. "I am not afraid of being in this place, gloomy as it appears; and since I am merely to address the miserable man through the trap-door of his dungeon, no harm can reach me."

Thus speaking, she turned and received the light from her companion,—her manner being calm and even resolute, though her countenance was very pale.

"God bless you, Esther!" said the Black, emphatically. "your willingness to aid me in this important matter is not the least admirable trait in your character!"

"It is a duty—though a painful one," responded the beautiful Jewess. "And now leave me—I would rather proceed alone to the prisoner's cell."

"Remember," said the Blackamoor, "it is the last on the right hand side of this long subterranean passage."

He then retraced his way up the stone-staircase communicating with the house in Red Lion Street, while Esther advanced along the gloomy cavern, in which the lamp shone but with feeble lustre.

In less than a minute she reached the door of Old Death's dungeon: and there she paused for nearly another minute, a sensation of loathing and horror preventing her from immediately announcing her presence to the terrible inmate of that cell. For the Black, in order to prepare her as fully and completely as possible for her philanthropic mission, had been compelled to reveal to her all the details

of those dreadful designs which Benjamin Bones had cherished against herself and Lady Hatfield, and which had been made known through the medium of John Jeffreys. It was therefore natural that Esther de Medina should shrink from the bare idea of holding the slightest communication with a miscreant of so ferocious a character: but a short—a very short interval of reflection was soon sufficient to arm her with the courage necessary to support the ordeal.

Drawing back the sliding-panel which covered the small aperture in the upper part of the massive door, she said in her soft, musical voice, "Prisoner, will you grant me your attention for a few minutes?"

"Who are you?" demanded Old Death, starting as if from a lethargic state—a movement that was indicated by the sudden rustling of his garments and the creaking of the bed whereon he was placed.

"I am Esther de Medina," was the answer; and the beautiful Jewess allowed the lamp to cast its light upon her countenance, which was so close to the aperture that Old Death caught a momentary but perfect view of her features.

She then placed the lamp upon the ground, thus again leaving the interior of the cell in complete darkness.

"Yes—it is Miss Esther de Medina!" exclaimed Benjamin Bones, in a voice which he endeavoured to render as mild and conciliatory as possible. "Dear young lady, open the door, and let me out of this horrible place. I am sure you possess a good heart—"

"A heart good enough to forgive you for the dreadful atrocity which you contemplated against me upwards of two months ago," interrupted Esther, scarcely able to subdue a shuddering sensation which came over her. "Yes—I know every thing," she continued: "you would have entrapped me into your power—you would have deprived me of the blessing of sight,—and yet I never, never injured you."

"But you say that you forgive me!" cried Old Death, impatiently. "Open the door, then, my sweet young lady—and I will find means to reward you well. Listen," he exclaimed, approaching the trap, and speaking in a confidential kind of hollow, murmuring whisper,—“don't be offended at what I am going to say—but I know that you are fond of jewellery—and it is natural for such a beautiful creature as you are—"

"Silence, sir!" interrupted Esther, indignantly. "I am well aware to what you allude; and it is time to undeceive you on that head," she added, in a proud tone: "indeed, there is no longer any necessity for concealment in that respect! In my turn I desire you to listen—and listen attentively. You entertain a belief so prejudicial to my character, that I cannot allow even such an one as you to cherish it another minute. Know, then, that I have a sister so like myself in outward appearance—"

"By Satan! it must be so," ejaculated Old Death, a light breaking in upon his mind as in a single moment he took a rapid survey of all the circumstances which had originally led him to suppose that Esther was the thief of Mr. Gordon's diamonds and the mistress of Tom Rain. "Yes—yes—I understand it all now!" he added, in a tone that appeared to imply vexation at his former blindness in respect to these matters.

"With pain and sorrow am I thus compelled to

allude to a sister who is so dear—so very dear to me," resumed Esther: "but this explanation was necessary—not only for my own sake, but likewise to convince you of the folly and wickedness of endeavouring to induce me, by the promise of reward or bribe, to draw back the bolts of your prison-door. No—my visit to you is inspired by the earnest desire to move your soul to the contemplation of all the dreadful deeds which have marked your life—"

"Then you will not set me free?" exclaimed Old Death, in a tone of subdued rage and latent ferocity. "Not now—not now," repeated Esther. "But listen to me attentively!"

"Go on," growled the inmate of the dungeon, as he retreated from the door, and threw himself upon his bed again.

"If you entertain the slightest hope that you will ever be allowed an opportunity to re-enter on a course of wickedness and crime, you are sadly mistaken," continued Esther, speaking in a conciliatory and yet energetic tone. "Even were you liberated this moment, measures would be adopted to render you completely powerless for the future in respect to the perpetration of fresh enormities. I set, then, whether it will not be better for you to devote the remainder of your days—and in the ordinary course of nature they must necessarily be few—to the important duty of making your peace with heaven! Do not despair of pardon—oh! no—do not despair! You see that I, who am a mortal being, can forgive you for the wrongs you meditated against me,—and surely the mercy of heaven is greater than that of human creatures? Yes—repent ere it be too late; and God will not cast you off eternally. His mercy is infinite: His pardon is never asked in vain by the penitent sinner."

"Continue to speak to me thus," cried Old Death, in a tone strangely subdued and wondrously meek, considering the ferocious excitement which so lately animated him.

"Oh! I sincerely hope that you will recognise the error of your ways, ere it be indeed too late!" exclaimed Esther, in a tone of enthusiasm deeply felt by her generous soul. "Consider your advanced age—and think how soon the hand of Death may be laid upon you! Then how wretched—how awful would your feelings be,—and how would you shudder at the idea of being about to stand in the presence of that Almighty Power whose laws and mandates you have so often violated! For, after all, what have you gained by your long, long career of wickedness? All your treasures were annihilated in one hour—"

"Yes—yes," interrupted Old Death, in a voice half suffocated with emotions which the Jewess fondly believed to be those of remorse.

"The hoardings of many years and the produce of innumerable misdeeds were thus swept away," she continued, impressively; "and Providence at length decreed that you should become a prisoner in the very place where you had so long ruled as a master. Does not heaven, then, afford you solemn and significant warnings that your career of crime is no more to be pursued with success?—and do not those warnings move your heart to repentance and remorse? Neglect not such warnings as these, I conjure you!"

"Your words do me good, young lady!" exclaimed Old Death. "I am glad that you have come thus to speak to me."

"And shall you ponder upon what I have said?" she demanded.

"Yes. But you will not leave me yet?—and you will come again?" he said, in a voice indicative of suspense and anxiety relative to the answer that was to be given.

"I will return to-morrow," observed Esther.

"Thank you!" exclaimed Old Death, his tone now denoting a profound emotion.

But Esther did not immediately leave the vicinity of the cell on the present occasion. Believing that she had succeeded in making some salutary impression upon him, she was desirous of following up the promising commencement of her mission; and she accordingly continued to reason with him for nearly half an hour longer. In the course of the observations and arguments which she addressed to the ancient sinner, she displayed a sound judgment and a deep but enlightened religious feeling: there was nothing bigoted—nothing fanatical in her language. She indulged in no quotations from the Old Testament—the book that formed the basis of her own nation's creed: but she expatiated on the goodness of the Creator—the hope that exists for penitent sinners—the terrors of a death-bed without previous repentance—and the folly, as well as the wickedness, of the course already pursued by the prisoner. Old Death interrupted her but seldom; and when he did interject an observation, it was in a tone and of a nature calculated to inspire the charming Jewess with the hope that her mission had not been undertaken in vain.

At length she quitted the vicinity of the cell, having reiterated her promise to return on the following day.

And this pledge was faithfully kept;—and again do we find the Hebrew maiden persevering in her humane—her noble task of awakening proper feelings in the breast of a terrible sinner. To her question whether he had meditated upon his spiritual condition, Old Death replied earnestly and eagerly in the affirmative; and throughout this second visit, he not only sought to retain the young lady near him—or rather at his door—as long as possible, but likewise seemed sincere in his endeavours to inspire her with the belief that her reasoning and her representations had not been thrown away upon him.

On the third day, Esther fancied that there was even a still more striking change in his language when he responded to her questions or her remarks; and not once, during the hour that she remained standing outside his dungeon, addressing him in a style of fervid eloquence which came from her very heart,—not once, we say, did he give the least sign of that ferocity and savage impatience which characterised his behaviour on the first occasion of her visit.

For a fortnight did the Hebrew maiden continue her visits regularly, without however venturing to enter the dungeon. On the fifteenth day she found the prisoner anxiously expecting her arrival as usual; and almost immediately after she had drawn aside the panel and announced her presence, he said, "Oh! dear young lady, I am so glad you are come! I have been thinking so much—so very much over all you have lately told me; and I have felt comforted by repeating to myself the arguments you advance urging me to repentance. Ah! Miss, I have been a dreadful sinner—a dreadful sinner;

and I see that I am righteously punished. But though I am penitent, you have no confidence in me yet—and that gives me pain. You are afraid to trust yourself with me! Do you think that I would harm you?"

"I hope not," replied Esther; "and you shall not much longer have to accuse me of want of confidence in you. I am pleased to observe that you at length feel how the time it is to become an object of mistrust and suspicion."

"You are an angel, young lady!" exclaimed Benjamin Bones, approaching the door on the outer side of which stood the Hebrew maiden. "No one on earth save yourself could have made such an impression upon my mind, and in so short a time. But will you promise me one thing?"

"Name your request," said Esther.

"That you will not send any man to converse with me," answered Old Death. "You are of the gentle sex—and that is why your sweet voice has had such power and influence with me. Had that gentleman—whoever he is—continued to visit me, he would have done no good. I suspect my own sex:—I do not think that men can be so sincere—so conscientious—"

"The gentleman to whom you allude will not visit you again without your consent," interrupted Esther. "I have undertaken this mission, and will fulfil it to the utmost of my ability. I have now something important to communicate,—important indeed, I should imagine, to one who has been so long in darkness. In a word, I intend to give you a lamp—"

"Oh! excellent young lady!" cried Benjamin Bones, in a voice expressive of the most unfeigned joy. "Make haste and open the door—give me the light—"

"Nay—I must not manifest too much confidence in you all at once. See what it is to have been so long, the votary of crime and wickedness—you inspire a mistrust which cannot be dissipated in a moment."

"What can I do to convince you of my repentance—my gratitude?" demanded Old Death, in an earnest—anxious tone.

"Leave me to judge for myself relative to your state of mind," said Esther. "You perceive that I already begin to entertain hopes concerning you: the proof is that I now give you a lamp—and a book; also, if you have a sincere inclination to examine its pages."

As she uttered these words, Esther unfastened the grating which covered the aperture, and passed the lamp through to Old Death—then the volume to which she had alluded.

The light flashed upon his countenance as he received the lamp; and it struck Esther that there was something hideous even in the expression of joy which now animated those repulsive features:—but she knew that looks which had grown sinister and become stamped with ferocious menace during the lapse of many, many years, could not be changed nor improved in a moment, however great were the moral reformation that had taken place within.

"Thanks, dear young lady—a thousand thanks!" exclaimed Old Death, as he placed the lamp upon the table: then, after a few minutes' pause, during which he looked into the book, he said in a tone of surprise, "But you have brought me a Bible containing the New as well as the Old Testament—and yet yourself only believe in the latter?"

"I respect the religion of the Christian, although I have been taught to put no faith in it," answered Esther de Medina, in a modest and subdued tone. "But I must now depart: and to-morrow I shall visit you again."

Esther withdrew, in the firm belief that a most salutary impression had been made upon the mind of one of the greatest criminals of modern times. Her report was received with the most heart-felt joy by the Blackamoor; and he was enthusiastic in his expressions of gratitude towards the beautiful maiden for her exertions in what may unaffectedly be denominated "a good cause."

"Do you return to Finchley Manor with me this evening?" she asked, cutting short his compliments with a good-humoured smile.

"No—I have particular business to attend to, Esther," he replied. "But you may tell a certain young lady," he added, now smiling in his turn, "that I shall be sure to see her to-morrow evening."

"To-morrow!" repeated Esther. "You forget—"

"Ah! I did indeed forget," interrupted the Black. "To-morrow is the day on which Arthur returns to town; and I must not risk a visit to the Manor. The fortnight of his absence has soon expired, methinks; but doubtless in that time he has made all the necessary preparation to render his country seat in Kent fitting and comfortable to receive his bride," observed the Black, smiling again. "Nay—do not blush, Esther: he is a noble fellow, and well deserving of all your love! And, by the bye, this absence on his part has proved most serviceable in one sense," he continued, again assuming a serious tone: "for had he remained in town, you never would have been able to devote the time you have given each day to the reformation of that wretched man below."

"To speak candidly," observed Esther, "I foresee a considerable difficulty relative to my future visits to the unhappy prisoner: but I feared to mention my embarrassment in this respect—I fancied that you might suppose me to be wearied of the task I had undertaken—"

"I know you too well to entertain such an injurious suspicion," interrupted the Black, hastily and emphatically. "But it is natural, now that Arthur and yourself are so shortly to be united, that he should seek your society as often and for as long a period each day as circumstances will permit—"

"Yes," observed Esther, with a modest blush: "and though his welfare is so deeply interested in our present enterprise—though, in a word, so many grave and important interests depend upon the success of our endeavours to humanize and reform that wretched prisoner, and disarm him for the future—still I could not stoop to any falsehood or subterfuge to account to the Earl of Ellingham for my daily absence from home for several hours. It is true that my father is in the secret of our proceedings—that he even approved of the course which you suggested, and which I have adopted—"

"Stay! an idea strikes me!" suddenly ejaculated the Black. "You told me ere now that Benjamin Bones implored you to continue your visits to him, and not allow me to take your place; and from this circumstance we have both drawn favourable auguries relative to his ultimate and complete repentance."

He already looks upon you as his guardian angel—the means of his salvation; and it would be perhaps productive of evil results—it might even lead to a moral reaction on his part—were he to believe that you had deserted him. You have so well prepared the way in the grand work of reformation with regard to this man, that another might now undertake your duties—and Benjamin Bones would still continue to believe that it is the same Esther de Medina who visits him."

"I understand you," said the Hebrew maiden, evidently rejoiced at a suggestion which relieved her mind from the fear of a serious difficulty. "But would you be satisfied with such an arrangement?"

"I see no alternative," replied the Black. "Arthur will call daily at Finchley Manor—and your frequent absence would, to say the least of it, appear strange."

"Oh! wherefore not allow Arthur at once to be made acquainted with the whole truth?" demanded Esther, in an earnest and appealing manner.

"No—no—that may not be!" exclaimed the Blackamoor. "My projects must first be carried out to the very end: for it would be my pride and my triumph, when all danger shall have passed away, to say to him, '*Arthur, you were surrounded by perils which you did not suspect: demons were plotting every kind of atrocity against your peace;—and I have annihilated all their schemes, and tamed the schemers themselves!*' Urge me not therefore, my dear Esther, to deviate from the course which I have chalked out for myself, and which I consider to be to some extent an atonement for the misdeeds of my own life. Yes—for he who accomplishes a great good, assuredly expiates a great amount of evil."

"For heaven's sake, recur not to the past!" murmured the beautiful Jewess, turning pale and shuddering at the crowd of unpleasant—nay awful reminiscences which her companion's language recalled to her mind.

"No—let us deliberate only for the present," exclaimed the Black; "and the more I think of the plan which I have suggested, the more suitable does it appear. Yes," he continued, "this is the only alternative. Let your visits to Benjamin Bones cease, Esther—and yet let him still continue to believe that he is not neglected nor deserted by Miss de Medina. I need say no more: the rest lies with you."

"I understand you," returned the Hebrew maiden; "and it shall be as you desire."

She then took her departure.

CHAPTER CXIV.

OLD DEATH IN THE DUNGEON.

It was five o'clock in the evening of the following day; and Old Death was crouched up, like a wild beast, upon his bed in the dungeon, which was now lighted by the lamp that Esther de Medina had given him.

His natural emaciation had so frightfully increased, that he seemed but a skeleton in the clothes which hung upon him as if they had never been made for one so thin as he. The skirts of his old grey coat were wrapped around his wasted shanks—for, though it was now the month of May, yet it was cold in that

dungeon. His countenance was wan and ghastly;—but its expression was little calculated to excite pity—for any thing more diabolically ferocious than the old miscreant's aspect, cannot be well conceived. His face was the horrible reflex of a mind filled with passions and longings of so savage and inhuman a nature, that the mere thought makes one shudder.

"She will come presently," he muttered to himself, with a kind of subdued growling which indicated the fury of his pent-up rage: "she will come presently," he repeated, his eyes glaring like those of a hyena beneath his shaggy, over-hanging brows; "and perhaps it will be for to-day! Who knows? she may think me penitent enough to be no longer dangerous: and then—then—"

He paused, and ground his jaws savagely together as if they were filled with teeth; and his hands were clenched with such spasmodic violence that the long nails ran into the palms.

"For two months and a half," he continued at length, and still musing to himself, "has the fiend—the infernal wretch—my mortal enemy, kept me here! For two months and a half have I been his prisoner! Perdition seize upon him! That man was sent into the world to be my ruin—to thwart me—to persecute me! From the first moment I ever met him six or seven months ago, all has gone wrong with me. But the day of vengeance must and shall come,—yes—vengeance—vengeance—though it costs me my life. Ah! he fancies that I am ignorant of his secret: and yet I understand it all now—yes—all, all! Rapid as was the gleam of the lamp which showed me his features the first time he ever visited me here, so quick did a light flash to my mind—so quick did the truth break upon me! Yes—yes—I understand it all now;—and he chuckled in a scarcely audible manner, yet the more horribly menacing because it was so subdued and low. "But how can it be?—how could he have been saved?" he asked himself, in his sombre musings: then, after a brief pause, during which he rocked to and fro on the bed, he continued, "Never mind the *how*! That such is the fact I am confident—and that is enough for me! Yes—yes—that is enough for me! Fool that I was ever for a moment to suspect him to be Lord Ellingham! And yet I should have clung to this belief, had not the lamp glared upon his face as he darted out of the cell! Ah! ah! he little thinks that I know him now—that I have known him ever since the moment when the light showed me his features, blackened as they were! Ah! ah!" again chuckled Old Death: "I fancy that I have lulled them into an idea of my penitence! They imagine that the work of reformation has begun with me! Ah! ha! I played my cards well there! I did not whine and weep too soon—I appeared to be precious tough, and precious obstinate—and my slow conversion seemed all the more natural. They will fall all the easier into the snare they—"

At this moment a slight noise at the door of the cell made the ancient miscreant start; and he instantaneously composed his features into as mournful and sanctimonious an expression as such a horribly hang-dog countenance could possibly assume.

The trap-door opened; and a sweet, musical voice said, "I am here again, according to my promise: you see that I do not desert you."

"Ah my dear young lady," cried Old Death, affect-

ing a tremulous tone, "you are too good to such a dreadful sinner as I have been! My God! when I think of all the atrocity that I once planned against you, I feel inclined to implore you to depart from even the vicinity of such a wretch as me!"

"Have you not been already assured that you are fully and completely forgiven in reference to the wickedness to which you allude?" demanded the young lady, whose beautiful countenance was now plainly visible to Old Death through the grating over the aperture in the door.

"Yes, Miss de Medina," returned the wretch, assuming a still more penitent tone; "but I cannot forgive myself. You are an angel, dear young lady—and I am a demon. I know I am! All last night I endeavoured to read the Bible that you gave me yesterday: but I cannot settle my mind to the task. I want some one to read it to me—if only for half an hour every day. But this cannot be—I am aware it cannot! You—the only person living that could have made such an impression upon me—are afraid to enter my cell. You told me so yesterday. But am I not a human being?—am I a wild beast? Ah! dear young lady—I could not injure you!"—and the old miscreant appeared to weep.

"Do you think it would console you if I were to place confidence in you—enter your cell—and read you a portion of the Word of God?"

"Why do you tantalize an old, old man who is miserable enough as it is?" asked Old Death, in return to this question. "Do you suppose that I am not weighed down to the very dust by an awful load of crime? If you are afraid to come into the cell, send me a clergyman. But, no—no," he added, as if yielding to the sudden influence of a second thought: "I will pray with no one but yourself! You have been my good angel—you first touched my heart. I must wait till you have sufficient confidence in me to follow up the blessed work you have already begun so well. Yes—yes—even if I must remain here for a whole year, I will not receive consolation from any one but you!"

"If I only thought that you were so far advanced in the path of penitence—"

"Can you doubt it?" hastily demanded the prisoner. "Have you such little confidence in your own powers of persuasion? Oh! my dear young lady," continued the wretch, falling upon his knees on the floor of the cell, and joining his hands together, "have pity upon me—have pity upon me! Your mistrust of me pierces like a dagger to my heart. I crave—I long to be able to show you my gratitude;—and that can only be by proving my contrition. Dear young lady, have mercy on an old, old man, who would embrace the very ground on which you tread!"

"It would be wicked—it would be a crime to refuse your demand," said the sweet, musical voice, now tremulous with emotion, of her whom the demon-hearted hypocrite called his good angel. "Stay—I will fetch the key—and on my return I will read the Bible to you."

And the Hebrew lady hurried away from the vicinity of the dungeon; and, having ascended the spiral stone staircase with rapid steps, entered the apartment usually inhabited by the Blackamoor. But he was not there: and she paused—uncertain how to act; for she now remembered that he had gone out for a short time immediately after giving



ner certain instructions relative to the conduct she was to maintain towards Old Death.

"I should not like to do this without his consent," she murmured to herself: "and yet the prisoner is so penitent—so contrite, that it would be a sin—nay, a crime, not to confirm the salutary impression which is now so strong upon him. Yes—yes," she continued: "I will take this step upon my own responsibility! Surely *he* will not blame me for thus exceeding his instructions, when the cause is so good and the need seems so urgent!"

Thus speaking, she took down a large key from a nail inside a cupboard, and retraced her way to the subterranean.

In the meantime—during the ten minutes which her absence lasted—Old Death was agitated by a thousand conflicting thoughts. At one moment an infernal joy filled his heart, and he rubbed his hands together in horrible and fiend-like glee: at the next instant his countenance became convulsed with the hideous workings of his fears lest something should occur to prevent the Jewess from entering his cell. He seemed to live an age in that ten minutes; and he felt that if the terrific excitement which he thus endured, were to last for an hour, it would crush

and overwhelm him. All the worst passions of his diabolical nature were set in motion like the waves of the sea: and in that short space of time were awakened feelings which, for intensity of awful spite and inveterate malignity, were probably never before nor since paralleled in the breast of man!

At length there was a slight rustling of a silk dress and the sound of a gentle though hasty tread in the passage without; and in a few moments the beautiful countenance of the Jewess appeared at the grated aperture.

"Blessed young lady!" exclaimed Old Death, suddenly exercising an immense mastery over his ferocious passions, and assuming a tone of mingled gratitude and hope.

"Heaven grant that the step which I am now taking may have a permanently beneficial effect!" said the Jewess, in a voice profoundly sincere, as she placed the key in the lock.

Then, with her gentle hands, she drew back the massive bolts; and in another moment she entered the dungeon in which the greatest miscreant that ever disgraced human nature was crouched upon the bed, like a tiger ready to spring from its lair.

For upwards of a minute this dreadful man could

scarcely believe his eyes—could scarcely credit his own senses. Was it possible that she was there—there, in his presence—there, in his power? It appeared to be a dream; and a momentary dizziness seized upon him. "Give me the Bible," said the Jewess, taking the chair; "and do you draw near me."

"Here is the book," observed Old Death, in a deep tone which might well be mistaken for the sign of solemn feelings, and was indeed so interpreted.

The lady placed the sacred volume upon the table before her, and began to turn over its leaves in order to find the passage which she deemed most appropriate and suitable for the circumstances of the occasion. Having discovered the chapter which she sought, she raised her eyes towards Old Death's countenance in order to assure herself that he was in readiness for her to begin; but a sudden sensation of horror and apprehension seized upon her, as she caught a glimpse of the diabolical expression of those features on which the pale light of the flickering lamp fell with sinister effect.

Then, with a howl of ferocious rage, that old man, whom the deep craving after a bloody vengeance now rendered as strong as a giant,—that old man precipitated himself upon the terrified Jewess with all the fury of a ravenous monster. The chair broke down beneath the shock; and with dreadful shrieks and appalling screams, the Hebrew lady fell upon the dungeon-floor, held tight in the grasp of the miscreant, who was uppermost.

In another instant those shrieks and screams yielded to subdued moans; for his fingers had fixed themselves round her throat like an iron vice. Desperate—desperate were her struggles,—the struggles of the agony of death: but Benjamin Bones seemed to gather energy and force from the mere fact of this strong resistance;—and as his grasp tightened round his victim's neck, low but savage growls escaped his lips.

By degrees the struggling grew less violent—and a gurgling sound succeeded the moans of the Jewish lady. Tighter—and more tightly still were pressed the demon's fingers, until his long nails entered her soft and palpitating flesh. Oh! it was horrible—horrible,—this scene of ruthless murder in that subterranean dungeon!

At length the movements of the victim became mere convulsive spasms: but her large dark eyes, now unnaturally brilliant, glared up at Old Death, fixedly and appallingly. Nevertheless, he was not terrified—he was not stricken with remorse! No—still, still he clung to his victim, his own eyes looking down ferociously into her's, and the workings of his countenance displaying a fiend-like triumph—a savage glory in the awful deed which he was perpetrating.

Nearly five minutes had elapsed from the instant when the murderer first sprang upon the unfortunate Jewess: and now, suddenly starting to his feet, he seized the lamp and dashed it upon her head. A low moan escaped her—and all was silent.

Yes—all was silent, and all was darkness too; for the light had been extinguished:—and Old Death precipitated himself from the dungeon.

He hurried along the subterranean, which he knew so well,—hurried along towards the spiral stair-case, wondering whether he should be enabled to effect his escape, yet almost reckless and desperate as to what might become of him, now that his savage vengeance was accomplished.

He ascended the stone steps—he entered the room

which had for years and years served him as a bed-chamber, before he had been compelled to dispose of the house to Lord Ellingham. He passed into the laboratory: and as yet he had proceeded without interruption. Joy! joy! he should escape yet—the adjoining room, now fitted up as a handsome parlour, was likewise untenanted at the moment:—joy! joy! he is descending the stair-case leading to the hall!

Is it possible that he will escape? Fortune seems to favour the diabolical murderer; and his hand is now upon the latch of the front-door—he stands as it were once more upon the threshold of that great world which is so wide and has so many channels for the machinations of the wicked! The house seems deserted—not a questioning voice falls upon his ear,—not the step of a human foot, save his own, interrupts the silence of the place! Yes—it appears as if escape be now a certainty,—escape for him who dared not hope for it, and did not even think of it, when intent on the all-absorbing scheme of his vengeance!

And now the front-door opens to his touch: but—ah! he has blood upon his hands—the blood that had flowed from the neck of the murdered Jewess. He starts back—he hesitates for a moment,—but only for a moment: Old Death is not the man to remain long uncertain how to proceed in such a strait!

Thrusting his hands—his gore-stained hands—into his pockets, the demon-hearted monster issues as coolly and calmly from the house as if it were his own and he had nothing to fear. The fresh air of heaven—untasted by him for ten long weeks—comes gushing upon his face: he is free—he is free!

"Ah!" is the hasty ejaculation which now falls on his ear: he looks around—a man is bounding, flying towards him;—and in another instant he is in the grasp of the Blackamoor.

A short and desperate struggle takes place; and a crowd immediately gathers near—for the Sessions are being held at Hicks's Hall, on Clerkenwell Green, so that the neighbourhood presents the bustling appearance usual on such occasions.

"Seize him—hold him!" yells forth Old Death, as his powerful opponent hurls him towards the house-door, which the miscreant had not closed behind him.

"He is a mad-man—escaped from a lunatic asylum!" exclaimed the Blackamoor, horrible apprehensions filling his soul relative to the Jewess—for his eyes had caught sight of the blood upon Old Death's hands.

"No—no—I am not a mad-man!" shrieked out the latter. "Seize him—hold him, I say:—*he has escaped the scaffold—he is TOM RAIN, the highway-man!*"

At that dreadful announcement the Blackamoor was struck speechless and motionless, as if a thunderbolt had fallen at his feet; and in the next instant he was in the grasp of Dykes and Bingham, who, having business at the Sessions House, happened to be amongst the crowd gathered at the entrance of Red Lion Street.

"Yes—seize him—hold him tight!" yelled Benjamin Bones: "he is Tom Rain, I tell you—his face is coloured purposely—but I know that he is Tom Rain!"

"And hold that miscreant also!" ejaculated Rainford—for he indeed the Blackamoor was: "seize him—let him not escape!" he cried, recovering the power of speech, as his eyes again caught a glimpse of the blood-stained hands of Old Death. "There has been murder committed in this house—My God! my God!"

The crowd had now not only increased to such an extent as to render the way perfectly impassable; but a tremendous sensation suddenly seized upon the assemblage,—the news that Tom Rain, the celebrated highwayman, had escaped death by some miraculous means, and was once more in custody, circulating like wild-fire. Dykes and Bingham, knowing that in such a case the sympathies of the mob were most likely to turn in favour of the prisoner, hurried him and Old Death into the house, whither they were followed by three or four other constables; and the door was immediately closed in the face of the crowd, and secured within.

On reaching the sitting-room on the first-floor, the party halted; and Old Death, now completely overcome by the excitement of the incidents which had so rapidly succeeded each other in a short half-hour, threw himself exhausted into a chair.

"Well, Mr. Rainford," said Dykes, with something like a malicious grin, "I am sorry for this business—but how, in the name of all that's wonderful, did you escape after being so deuced well hung as I seed you was with my own eyes?"

"Silence!" ejaculated Rainford, in an imperious tone: "and come with me at once down below. For, as sure as you are there, murder—a horrible murder has been committed by that wretch," pointing to Old Death, who now quivered beneath his furious looks; "and, if you doubt it, behold the blood upon his hands!" added Tom Rain, with a cold shudder.

"Bring him along with us, Bingham," said Dykes, addressing his brother officer.

"No—no—I won't go down there again!" yelled forth the murderer, his countenance becoming convulsed with horror; for he was now afraid of his crime, in the revulsion of his feelings.

"Well—let him stay here in custody," observed Dykes; "and me and a couple of the runners will go with Mr. Rainford."

The officer and the two myrmidons whom he had selected, accordingly proceeded with Tom Rain into the room where the trap-door of the spiral stair-case had been left open by Old Death; and the constables surveyed each other with mingled apprehension and astonishment.

"You are not afraid?" exclaimed Rainford, in a contemptuous tone, as he lighted a lamp: then, with impatient excitement, he cried, "Do your duty, and come with me. Life may still be left in her—come—come!"

"Yes—yes: we shall go along with you, sure enough," growled Dykes, as he led the way, followed by Rainford—the two runners closing the rear.

In three minutes more the little party entered the dungeon which had so lately been the prison-house of Old Death: and there what a dreadful spectacle met their eyes! The murdered lady was stretched upon the floor—her countenance horribly discoloured and swollen—the forehead completely smashed by the blow inflicted by the lamp which had been dashed at her—and her eyes staring with a stony glare, as if about to start out of their sockets.

"O Tamar! Tamar! my dearest—best beloved Tamar!" cried Tom Rain, in a tone of bitter—bitter—anguish, as he threw himself upon his knees by the side of the corpse.

The officers, rude in heart, and rendered obdurate as they were by the very nature of their profession, stood back in respectful silence at this outburst of sorrow from the lips of the resuscitated highwayman.

"My God!" murmured the unhappy man, clasping his hands together; "who shall break these fearful tidings to your father and your sister? And will they not reproach me?—will they not attribute this frightful calamity to that project of reformation which I had devised in behalf of Benjamin Bones? O Tamar—my dearest Tamar—who could have foreseen that such a terrible destiny was in store for thee!"

And, bowing down his head, he wept bitterly.

Suddenly loud voices were heard from the top of the spiral stair-case, summoning Dykes thither.

"Come along, sir—it is useless to remain here!" cried the officer, speaking hastily but respectfully to Tom Rain, who suffered himself to be led away—or rather, he did not offer any resistance to those who conducted him thence.

"Well—what now!" demanded Dykes, hurrying up the steps, at the head of which his friend Bingham was continuing to shout after him.

"Why—don't you know," was the reply, "that Government has offered a reward for the discovery of the chap wot carried off Sir Christopher Blunt and Dr. Lascelles—about that there Torrens's affair—"

"Well—what then?" cried Dykes, impatiently.

"Blowed if it ain't Tom Rain," responded Bingham: "he did it—and we've nabbed him. So that's a cool two hundred and fifty a piece!"

"By goles!" ejaculated Dykes, his countenance expanding into the most glorious humour possible, as if all remembrance of the horrible scene he had just witnessed were banished from his mind: "this is good news, though," he added, as he emerged from the stair-case into the little back room with which it communicated. "But how do you know that the chap as kidnapped the knight and the doctor is Mr. Rainford?"

"Because I've been talking with old Ben Bones," answered Bingham; "and he told me as how he'd been kidnaped too, and kept a prisoner down there for a matter of ten weeks;—and how there was a lot on 'em—and Josh Pedler and Tim Splint among the rest. So, when he mentioned them names, I pricks up my ears—and I asks him a question or two; and I find that they was all kidnaped just at the time that the Torrens affair was a-making sich a noise: so it's a clear case."

"Clear enough, to be sure!" exclaimed Dykes.

"Ben Bones does n't seem to know any thing about that affair," continued Dykes: "cos why, he was lugged off and took down in that there place afore the business was made public by Sir Christopher and the doctor. But, I say—what has happened below?"

"A young o'man killed—that's all," answered Dykes. "So here's a pretty day's business for us, Bingham: a man that had been hung, took up fast—then a murder diskivered, and the murderer in our power—and now this here affair about the Government reward. Well—we v'e been rather slack lately—and a little olkipation 's quite a blessin'."

Thus conversing together, Mr. Dykes and Mr. Bingham returned to the apartment where Old Death was still sitting in a chair, watched by a couple of constables: but the moment Rainford, who had only a confused idea of what was passing around him, was led into that room, he started back in horror—exclaiming, "No—no: I cannot bear to be in the company of this dreadful man!"

Old Death, to whom he pointed, grinned in savage triumph: but Rainford had already rushed back into the laboratory, attended by Dykes and two runners.

Almost at the same instant, the lad Cæsar who had heard from the crowd outside enough to convince him that Rainford had been discovered, and also that a person answering the description of Old Death had first denounced the resuscitated highwayman, and had then himself been arrested on a charge of murder,—Cæsar, we say, now made his appearance, and threw himself at his master's feet, exclaiming wildly, "Oh! no—my generous friend—my more than father—they shall not take you from us!"

"Jacob," said Tom Rain, raising the distracted youth, who was no other than the reader's former acquaintance, Jacob Smith,— 'do not yield to grief. We have need of all our courage on this occasion. I have received a frightful blow—wounded I am in the tenderest point—oh! I can scarcely restrain my anguish, while conjuring you to be calm! And yet it is necessary to meet my afflictions face to face! Hasten, then, to Finchley—and break the sad intelligence to Mr. de Medina and Esther: tell them, Jacob—as gently as you can—tell them that Benjamin Bones has crowned all his enormities by——"

"My God! it is then too true!" ejaculated the youth; covering his face with his hands.

"Yes—Tamar is no more!" added Rainford, tears gushing from his eyes. "My poor wife has been brutally—foully murdered by that miscreant!"

Jacob Smith hurried away, his own heart feeling as if it were about to break.

"And now," said Tom Rain, suddenly turning towards Dykes, "I appeal to you as men to allow me to superintend the removal of the remains of that lady, who was my wife, to a chamber in this house; and then, that duty being performed, I shall be ready to accompany you whithersoever you may choose to conduct me."

"We are not particular for an hour or so, Mr. Rainford," returned Dykes. "Indeed, it would be better to let the crowd disperse a little; and if so be you do n't mind staying here a bit, we'll wait till dark. The evenings is long now, you see——"

"I should have wished to remain here until the relatives of the deceased lady had time to arrive and take charge of the body," interrupted Tom Rain: "but I dared not ask such a favour at your hands. As it is, however, I thank you."

"But you must likewise let old Ben Bones stay here, until after dusk at least," urged Dykes: "for if it was knowed to the people outside that it was the ancient fence who had killed a woman, they'd be after tearing him to pieces. So we must smuggle him out presently."

Rainford gave his consent to the proposition: he was too sick at heart—too profoundly overwhelmed by misfortune, to attempt to argue any question that might arise from the lamentable incidents of that evening.

CHAPTER CXV.

THOMAS RAINFORD.

The arrest of Tom Rain and Old Death took place at about twenty minutes to six on the evening in question; and by ten o'clock that night the news were circulated throughout every quarter of the metropolis.

The incidents involved in the double arrestation were well adapted to produce as much excitement as

the extraordinary adventures of Sir Christopher Blunt and Dr. Lascelles ten weeks previously.

In the first place, a man who had been publicly executed at Horsemonger Lane, was now discovered to be alive, having been doubtless resuscitated in some extraordinary way; although the more credulous and wonder-loving portion of the community were firmly convinced that Tom Rain had never been hanged at all, but that the body of some prisoner recently deceased at the time was ushered through the dreadful ordeal instead of the formidable highwayman.

In the second place, this said Thomas Rainford was said to be the mysterious personage who, usurping the attributes of justice, had kidnapped Dr. Lascelles and Sir Christopher Blunt, and had somehow or another disposed of the real murderers of Sir Henry Courtenay, after having devised the necessary means to prove and make public the innocence of Mr. Torrens.

In the third place, a notorious fence, named Benjamin Bones, who had defied the police and the laws for many, many years, had at last fatally entangled himself with justice, by committing a diabolical murder upon the person of Thomas Rainford's wife.

And, in the fourth place, it had been discovered that there were situate two houses in the very heart of London having a subterraneous passage connecting them, and this subterranean communicating with several dark and gloomy dungeons, decently furnished, and in which half-a-dozen prisoners had recently been confined. One of these prisoners was now known to be Benjamin Bones: but what had become of the other five?

Such were the circumstances which took the whole town by storm, and produced a tremendous sensation from one end of London to the other,—the intelligence reaching even Lady Hatfield, retired and secluded as was her mode of living.

Shortly after ten o'clock on that eventful evening, a private carriage drove up to the house in Red Lion Street; and Mr. de Medina, Esther, and Lord Ellingham alighted. Jacob Smith leapt down from the box; and in a few moments the entire party entered the dwelling, thus disappearing from the gaze of the assembled crowd.

The Jew, his daughter, and the young nobleman were immediately conducted by one of Rainford's dependants into the apartment where the unhappy husband of the murdered Tamar was pacing up and down, Dykes sitting in a corner watching his movements. The prisoner was no longer disguised: during the interval which had elapsed since his arrest, he had, by the officer's express desire, washed off the black dye from his face and hands; and he now wore his natural aspect in one sense—though, in another, his expressive countenance was altered by the despair that filled his soul.

"Oh! Thomas—what terrible afflictions have occurred!" exclaimed Lord Ellingham, as he flew into his half-brother's arms.

"You will not reproach me, Arthur—Oh! do not augment my grief!" cried Rainford: and he wept bitter tears.

"No one will reproach you, excellent young man," said Mr. de Medina, taking the hand of his bereaved son-in-law. "But—Oh! my daughter—my daughter, Tamar! Great God! thou hast chosen to afflict me deeply—deeply!"

In the meantime, Esther de Medina had thrown herself into a chair, giving way to the wildest

was the best suited to Rainford's designs; and it was speedily furnished in a suitable manner. The neighbours believed that a retired East Indian merchant had taken the place; and therefore no surprise—no excitement was occasioned, when they perceived that the new tenant had his private carriage and numerous dependants. But how did Rainford manage to obtain the assistance of several faithful persons, who were blindly obedient to his will, and to one of whom—named Wilton—he entrusted his entire history? They were all poor and deserving persons whom I knew well—men who had at different times been my patients, and in whom I felt an interest. Thus, in a very few days, the most complete arrangements were effected; and just at the moment when Rainford was prepared to commence operations, and when he had succeeded in tracing the abode of Benjamin Bones, chance threw him in the way of a certain John Jeffreys, whom he resolved to render subservient to his purposes in uprooting the atrocious gang."

The physician then proceeded to relate the manner in which Rainford had drawn Jeffreys into his service,—the revelations made to him by that individual's unfolding all the dreadful schemes of vengeance contemplated by Old Death, and directed against the happiness of the Earl himself,—the projected exhumation of the coffin in Saint Luke's church-yard, and the ferocious idea of blinding Lady Hatfield and Esther de Medina,—the mode in which these diabolical aims were frustrated by the arrest of all the members of Old Death's gang,—and the faithful conduct of Jeffreys. Dr. Lascelles also narrated the proceedings of Rainford in the difficult affair of Mr. Torrens,—how, disguised as an old man, and admirably sustaining that character, he had entrapped Sir Christopher Blunt to the house in Red Lion Street to preside at the examination of the two prisoners,—and how he (Dr. Lascelles) had become a party to that transaction,—all of which particulars are well known to the reader. Finally, the physician made the Earl acquainted with the nature and the results of the system of reformation applied to all the members of the gang,—how it had succeeded in respect to Tidmarsh, the Bunce, Pedler and Splint,—and how Esther de Medina had deputed her unfortunate sister to visit Benjamin Bones on that fatal evening which was characterised by a savage murder!

There was only one point connected with Rainford's affairs, on which the Earl and the physician did not touch; and this was the parentage of little Charley Watts. The doctor was unacquainted with the fact that Rainford had some years back forcibly violated the person of Lady Hatfield, and that the issue of this crime was the boy who still bore the name by which we have just called him. The Earl of Ellingham naturally veiled the circumstance even from a friend so intimate and sincere as Lascelles; and though the doctor knew that Lady Hatfield had been a mother, he also kept this knowledge to himself, and was very far from suspecting the true history of Charley Watts. Lascelles, it will be remembered, had made the discovery relative to Georgiana on that occasion when he attended her in her severe illness, and when he gave her a soporific, as recorded in the early part of this work: but he had never mentioned that discovery to a soul;—and the Earl of Ellingham was as far from supposing that Lady Hatfield's loss of chastity was known to the physician, as the physician was from entertaining even the remotest idea relative to the parentage of the boy.

But Rainford was already aware that this boy was his own son—the issue of the outrage which he had perpetrated upon Lady Hatfield! Yes—on the evening before this interview between the Earl of Ellingham and Dr. Lascelles, the former had so far intruded upon his brother's profound grief, as to make to him a revelation which a sense of duty forbade him to delay. Rainford also learnt, at the same time, that Georgiana was herself acquainted with the fact of her child being in his care—placed under his protection as it were by the inscrutable decrees of Providence! But for the sake of the honour of Lady Hatfield, and sparing Rainford from the necessity of giving unpleasant and degrading explanations to his friends, it had been determined between Lord Ellingham and himself that the boy should still continue to bear the name of Watts, and that his real parentage should be unacknowledged—at least for the present.

In order not to dwell with tedious minuteness upon this portion of our narrative, we shall briefly state that the funeral of Tamar took place on the day appointed; and if the tears of heart-felt grief streaming from the eyes of true mourners can avail for the souls of the departed, then the spirit of the murdered Jewess must have received ample solace and full propitiation in those regions to which it had taken wing!

But how deep a gloom had fallen upon the family of Medina;—and how poignant was the anguish which the bereaved father and sister experienced for the departed!

Nor less acute was the sorrow of the husband who survived that fair but prematurely crushed flower of Israel;—for immense was thy love for her, Tom Rain!

CHAPTER CXVIII.

THE INSOLVENT DEBTORS' COURT.

PASSING through Portugal Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields, you may perceive a low, dingy-looking building, protected by a row of tall iron railings, and with steps leading to the front entrance. This structure is of so dubious an aspect that it places the stranger in a profound state of uncertainty as to whether it be the lobby of a criminal prison or a Methodist chapel; and the supposed stranger is not a little surprised when he learns, on inquiry, that this architectural mystery is neither more nor less than the Court for the Relief of Insolvent Debtors.

At about nine o'clock in the morning the immediate vicinity of the Court begins to wear a very business-like appearance: that is to say, both sides of the street are thronged with the most curious specimens of human nature which it is possible to encounter outside of Newgate or of the Bench. The wonder is whence such a host of ill-looking fellows can have sprung, or whither they can be going, unless it is to either of the two places just named. Then comes the natural question, "But who are they?" The answer is at hand: some are the turnkeys of the County Prisons and the tipstaves of the Bench, having in their charge prisoners about to be heard at the Court,—others are the usual bangers-on and errand-seekers who are always to be found lurking about such places,—while a third set are the friends or else the opposing creditors of the Insolvents. The public-house opposite the Court, and the one at the side are also filled with persons of these descriptions; and before ten o'clock

wards Lady Hatfield, "obtained the royal pardon for Thomas Rainford, I well know—indeed, I have all along known."

"You!" ejaculated Georgiana, in profound astonishment.

"Yes—I overheard your interview with the King in the Blue Velvet Closet at Carlton House," continued the Earl; "and now I comprehend all the greatness and generosity of your conduct! Oh! and you must pardon me too, for having become a listener on that occasion, and for having ever since entertained suspicions most injurious to your honour."

"The remainder of the tale can then be told by myself," said Tom Rain, hastily: "for it was I—the blackamoor—the negro—who saved your ladyship from insult and outrage, also at Carlton House. But—" he continued, glancing in a significant manner towards Dykes—"all these explanations shall be for another and more convenient opportunity. In the meantime, Arthur," he added, "it is for you to repair at once to the Home Secretary, and obtain from him all we require to ensure my complete freedom, by virtue of that acknowledgment bearing the sign-manual of the King."

The Earl of Ellingham instantaneously undertook this commission, although at so late an hour; but he fortunately happened to be aware that the Secretary for the Home Department had a reception that evening, and was therefore certain to be at home.

Dykes, who had been led on from one source of astonishment to another, and who perceived that Thomas Rainford not only possessed powerful friends, but likewise the patronage and favour of the King himself—the worthy Mr. Dykes, we say, now volunteered to withdraw into another room, merely requesting his prisoner to pledge his honour not to leave the house until the order of the Secretary of State should fully and completely release him from custody. The promise was given forthwith; and Dykes repaired to the apartment where Old Death was still remaining in the custody of Bingham and the other constables.

Immediately after the officer had retired, Georgiana rose to take her departure. This was the first time that she had ever seen the Medinas; but she accosted them with the affability of a well-bred lady, and professed them to be her dearest and sincerest sympathy on account of the dreadful loss which they had sustained. They received these proofs of friendship in a manner which denoted the gratitude of their hearts; and Georgiana, on taking leave, shook them cordially by the hand.

Then, extending her hand likewise to him whose mere name had hitherto been sufficient to send a cold shudder through her entire form,—yes, extending her hand to him also, in the true spirit of Christian forgiveness,—but without raising her eyes to his countenance, she said, "Mr. Rainford, may you yet know many years of happiness!"

He pressed her hand with grateful fervour—and a tear dropped upon it; but he could not utter a word. His heart was too full to allow him to express his thanks—his admiration of the noble conduct of that woman whom, in a moment of delirium, as it were, he had outraged and ruined! Ah! bitter—bitter were thy reminiscences as thus thou didst stand before thy generous benefactress, Tom Rain!

Mr. de Medina—perceiving that his son-in-law was overcome by emotions which were not altogether intelligible to him—offered his arm to escort Lady Hatfield to her carriage; and Georgiana drove home with

a heart rejoicing at the good she had done—for Lord Ellingham's sake!

The Jew returned to the apartment where he had left Esther and Rainford; and there they all three mingled their grief together, for the loss of the lovely and much-loved Tamar.

But over this scene we shall draw a veil: sorrow such as they experienced cannot be adequately described. Neither shall we do more than allude to the violence of the grief and the poignancy of the anguish which were felt when they repaired to the chamber to which the remains of the murdered Tamar had been conveyed. The reader does not require to be informed that this was a ceremony of the most painful description.

While, therefore, Mr. de Medina, Esther, and Rainford, are mingling their tears and lamentations,—while, too, the Earl of Ellingham is absent on his mission to the Home Secretary, armed with the document which bore the autograph and seal of George the Fourth,—we shall request our reader to accompany us to the apartment where Old Death remains in the custody of Bingham and the subordinate officials.

CHAPTER CXVI.

OLD DEATH.

WHEN Dykes made his appearance in the room just alluded to, he found Benjamin Bones rocking himself to and fro on the chair in which he was seated, while Bingham and the runners were partaking of refreshments at the table.

The old miscreant was horribly pale; and there was a wild glaring of the eyes which enhanced the ghastly expression of his countenance. The man was in fact hideous to behold.

Now that he had leisure for reflection, and that the excitement attending the perpetration of his bloody vengeance had passed away, he had become fearfully alive to the awful predicament in which he stood: nevertheless his entire aspect denoted dogged obduracy; and could he have recalled the past, it is more than probable that he would have played precisely the same part over again.

"Well, Mr. Dykes," said Bingham, as the worthy thus addressed entered the room, "will you jine us here in a bit of grub? You see, we're pitching into the cold joint like bricks; and the beer is first-rate."

"So is the pickles," growled one of the runners, who was naturally of a surly disposition, and could not help speaking in a grunting tone even when best pleased.

"Come, sit down with us," urged Mr. Bingham.

"But, I say though, what have you done with Tom Rain?"

"Done with him, indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Dykes, swelling with the importance of a man who had astounding news to communicate: "what has n't he done for his-self, you mean?"

"Has he cut his throat—or taken poison?" demanded Old Death, eagerly.

"Not he!" cried Dykes. "Why—you cursed old fence, you've always got wicked notions in your head—you have. Mr. Rainford is a gentleman, every inch of him—and I always knowed it. He's got a power of slap-up friends as won't leave him long in the lurch, I can tell you."

And the officer bestowed a significant wink upon his

listeners, whose curiosity he had now worked up to the highest pitch.

"What—what has he done?" gasped Old Death, terribly excited with suspense. "Do you mean to say—that is—has he—*escaped*?" he demanded, scarcely able to give utterance to the word; so fearful was he lest Tom Rain, against whom he cherished a fiend-like hatred, should not again figure upon the scaffold.

"Patience—patience," said Mr. Dykes, taking a chair. "In the first place, you must know, that in comes a lady—and who should she be but that very same Lady Hatfield as I'm sure Tom Rain robbed some months ago near Hounslow, although I could n't bring the thing home to him at the time—"

"Well—well," muttered Old Death, the agony of whose suspense was perfectly excruciating.

"But fust I should tell you," resumed Mr. Dykes, "that Miss de Medina comes in with her father and Lord Ellingham—"

Old Death gave vent to a savage growl.

"And now I understand all about that diamond affair, Bingham, you know," continued the officer; "for, although one of the sisters is a corpse and her face is disfigured, I never in my life see such a likeness as there is between them."

We should observe that Old Death had already learnt, from the communications which had been made in his presence by the runners who were first in charge of Tom Rain on this eventful evening, that it was not Esther de Medina whom he had slain, but Tamar—the wife of the man whom he considered to be his most mortal enemy.

"But as I was a-saying," continued Dykes, "in comes Lady Hatfield; and, behold ye! she makes a regular set speech to prepare us all for what's about to take place; and then she tells us plump that Tom Rain has received his Majesty's free pardon!"

"No—no!" yelled forth Old Death: "it's a lie—it's a lie!"

"Hold your tongue, you cursed fence!" exclaimed Mr. Dykes, deeply indignant at having his word thus unceremoniously called in question. "Lady Hatfield had the paper with her, all reglar according to the statit in that case made and purwided."

"It's a forgery—a rank forgery!" shrieked Benjamin Bones, his countenance becoming truly appalling with its hideous workings. "And you have let him go, upon that pretence—you—you have—"

And he fell back in his chair, gasping for breath.

"Wot an inveterate old scoundrel it is," observed Bingham. "Here—give him a glass of beer, Bill; or, by goles, he'll suffocate—and the scaffold will be cheated of its dues after all."

The runner, to whom the command was addressed, approached Old Death and offered him a tumbler of porter: but the savage monster repulsed it brutally, ferocious growls escaping from his breast.

"Well—leave him alone, then," said Bingham.

The runner accordingly resumed his seat and his attack upon the cold viands at the same time.

"I tell you what it is, Mr. Ben Bones," exclaimed Dykes: "I have seen a many free pardons—specially where gentlemen that got into trouble was concerned, for it's seldom that a poor devil has interest enough to get such a thing—and I know precious well that the one I see just now, was as reglar as possible. It had the King's own name—his sign-mangle, they call it—and his precious big seal—and the Home Secretary's *signature* underneath."

"He will escape—he will escape yet!" yelled forth Old Death, clasping his hands together, as if in morbid agony. "The wretch—he will escape the gibbet—he—he—"

And again he gasped in so frightful a manner that his eyes seemed to be starting from his head, and his attenuated frame literally writhed in convulsive spasms.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, after a long pause, during which his shocking appearance had produced a dead silence of horror and amazement: "I have thought of something"—and he grinned malignantly. "Did you not say that men had been spirited away—in that Torrens' affair—"

"To be sure I did," answered Bingham, to whom the question was addressed: "and Tom Rain did it. Well, what about that, Mr. Dykes?"

"Why—that seems to be knocked on the head also," was the reply: "though I have no doubt we shall get the reward, because we did our dooty in arresting him; and if so be that the Home Secretary chooses to grant him a pardon in that respect also—"

"He won't—he won't!" ejaculated Old Death, with feverish—nay, with hysterical excitement. "He does not dare do it! No—no—Tom Rain must swing for that, at all events! 'Tis as good as being accessory to the murder—it's shielding the murderers! Ha! ah! he will swing for that—he will swing for that!"

"I'm blessed if he will, though," said Dykes, bluntly; "for it seems that he's got a paper signed by the King which will put him all to rights;—and though I don't exactly understand that part of the business, I'm pretty sure Tom Rain is in no danger. Lord Ellingham has got the matter in hand; and he has gone up to the Home Office. That's why I left Mr. Rainford at liberty—just taking his word of honour that he would n't bolt."

"He'll deceive you—he'll run away—he'll escape!" cried Old Death. "You are mad to trust him! Go—seize on him again—put hand-cuffs—"

"Yes—on you, in no time—if you do n't hold your tongue," interrupted Mr. Dykes. "But ain't all this a rummy business, though?" he demanded, turning towards Bingham and the subordinate officials. "The old Jew seems a most respectable genelman—I'd take his bail for any amount, if I was a magistrate. And really his daughter is a sweet young o'man: the Earl's going to marry her, I'll swear to it."

"Mr. Dykes—Mr. Dykes," whispered Old Death in his ear; and the officer, turning suddenly round again, perceived that the tall, gaunt form of the fence was close behind him.

"Well—what do you want?" demanded the functionary.

"One word—one word only," murmured Bones, in a low, guttural, sepulchral tone, while his frame shook with nervous excitement: "one word, I say—only one word."

"Now, then—what is it?" asked Dykes, suffering the old man to draw him towards the recess containing the door which opened into the laboratory.

"I must speak to you in private—I have something particular to tell you," was the urgent and impatient reply. "Come into this room—I shan't keep you a moment."

"Well—I suppose I mast humour you," said the officer, in a surly tone. "One should look upon you as a dead man; for besides your nick-name, the law will soon make you one in right good earnest."

With this brutal jest—brutal even in respect to so

awful a miscreant as Old Death—the Bow Street functionary conducted him into the laboratory, where a light happened to be burning, and the door of which apartment Benjamin Bones closed cautiously behind them.

"Now, then—make haste, and tell us all you have got to say," said Dykes, eyeing the old man suspiciously and in such a meaning fashion as to imply that any attempt at escape would assuredly prove abortive.

"Mr. Dykes, you are a good man—and a kind man—I know you are," began Old Death, in a coaxing tone and with a manner indicating the most dreadful state of nervous excitement: "you would not like to see a poor, miserable old creature like myself sent to—to the scaffold. No—no—you would not—you would not. But I know that it must be made worth your while—you understand me—and—and—I will give you all I have—yes, all I have—several thousand pounds—for I have got several thousands!" he added, with a ghastly grin. "But no one knows where they are except myself,—and you and I can go together to the place—and I will give you every guinea—yes, every guinea. Mr. Dykes—remember, every guinea I say—if you will agree to this."

"Agree to what?" demanded Dykes, affecting not to comprehend the old villain.

"Oh! just as if you did n't understand me, my dear friend—my good, kind friend!" exclaimed Benjamin Bones, becoming more coaxing in his tone, which was as low and subdued as his sepulchral voice would admit. "Do consider for an instant—an old man like me to be in such trouble! You would n't be happy if you had it on your mind that you had been the means—the actual means of sending such a wretched creature as myself to the scaffold? Speak to me, Mr. Dykes! Five thousand pounds—yes—five thousand pounds, in good gold guineas—if—if—"

"If what?" asked the officer, with the most provoking determination not to understand any thing that was not explained in unmistakeable words.

"If you—you will let me escape!" whispered Old Death, while his eyes seemed to penetrate to the very soul of the man towards whom he bent in a confidential way as he spoke.

"Now that's English," said Dykes, whose countenance gave not the least indication of the manner in which he intended to receive the proposition.

"And—and you will agree, won't you?" asked Bones. "Remember—five thousand guineas—all to be paid in one lump—this very night—"

"Well, now—it can't be done, old chap," interrupted Dykes, in a cool—almost brutal manner, as if he were glad of the opportunity to encourage hope for a time, merely for the sake of destroying it with a rude hand and in an abrupt way.

"It can't be done," murmured Old Death, despair seizing upon him: "it can't be done, you say?"—and his eyes glanced wildly around.

"Is this all you have to tell me?" demanded the officer. "Because, if so—"

"Five thousand guineas!—and he refuses it!" ejaculated Bones. "My God! what will become of me?—what will become of me?"

And still his looks wandered rapidly about the apartment.

"Now, then—let us go back into the next room, if you please," said Dykes; "for I don't see no use in staying here, wasting our time."

At that instant Old Death's eyes settled upon some-

thing on a shelf close at hand; and, suddenly springing aside, he seized upon a bottle—the particular object for which he had been searching with his eager glances.

Dykes, without even having a moment's leisure to make a single conjecture relative to his intentions, but instinctively foreseeing that something wrong was contemplated, closed upon the old man in an instant.

With the speed of lightning did Benjamin Bones raise the bottle which his right hand grasped; and in less than the twinkling of an eye would it have been smashed down upon the officer, who, seeing his danger, by a natural impulse held down his head—when a yell of agony burst from the lips of the old miscreant.

For, as he raised the bottle, the glass stopper fell out, and the burning vitriol streamed down on his head and over his countenance, a few drops only falling upon Dykes, and those principally on his clothes.

The officer instantaneously fell back; and Old Death threw himself on the floor, where he rolled in horrid agonies—writhing like a stricken snake, and shrieking frantically, "Oh! my eyes! my eyes!"

Bingham and the subordinate functionaries rushed in from the adjoining apartment; and, having assured themselves that Dykes was unhurt—although his escape from the burning fluid was truly miraculous—they turned their attention towards Old Death. One of them obtained water, and dashed it over him; but still he rolled and writhed—uttering dreadful cries, mingled with horrid imprecations—and rubbing his face madly with his hands. For the miserable wretch was burnt in an appalling manner; and his sight was gone!

We must pause for a single moment to explain his design—that design which so signally failed and brought down such frightful consequences upon himself. Perceiving that all hope of being able to bribe Mr. Dykes was frustrated, he thought of the only alternative that could possibly be attempted—an escape. At the same instant that this last idea was formed, it flashed to his mind that Dr. Lascelles had been accustomed to keep many deadly poisons and ardent fluids in the laboratory. His eyes wandered round in search of them; and they lighted upon a large bottle, labelled "Vitriol." To break it over the officer's head, and escape in the confusion that must ensue by means of the little chamber which had once been his bed-room, and which, as the reader may recollect, had two doors—one opening from the laboratory, and the other into apartments beyond,—this was the hastily conceived but discomfited design of Old Death!

The desperate project had failed—and in a desperate manner, too: for the miscreant had received mortal injuries—and his sufferings were horrible. A pint of vitriol had streamed over his head—penetrating beneath his clothes, all down his neck and chest—burning him horribly, even to his very eyes in their sockets!

Rainford, alarmed by the hideous yells which had reached him in another part of the spacious house, rushed into the laboratory to ascertain the cause, having begged Mr. de Medina and Esther to await his return. At the same instant that he entered by one door, Jacob Smith made his appearance by another; and Dykes hastily explained what had occurred. Rainford accordingly issued immediate orders to transport the dying man to a bed-chamber; and fortunately, at this crisis, Dr. Lascelles arrived at the house.

The physician had been alarmed by the rumours which prevailed relative to the incidents that had oc-



occurred in Red Lion Street: but a few words, rapidly exchanged with Tom Rain, relieved the doctor of all apprehensions on account of his friend;—and all his attention was now devoted to Old Death.

But though the laboratory promptly supplied all the remedies needed in such a case, their application was vain. They gave relief, it is true: but they could not arrest the rapid advances which death was making upon the wretched old man.

"Jacob," cried the doctor: "Jacob Smith, I say," he repeated more impatiently, the lad not having heard his first summons; "hand me that bottle, and—"

"Jacob Smith!" cried Old Death, his moanings suddenly ceasing at the mention of that name: "is he here? Then let me tell him—My God! this burning sensation—Jacob—Jacob—my poor boy—Oh! my eyes—my eyes—doctor, do something to my eyes—they are like red-hot coals in my head—Jacob—I—I—am your—father!"

"My father!" almost shrieked the lad, in the wildness of his amazement at these tidings: then, falling on his knees by the bed-side, he exclaimed, "Oh! if you are indeed my parent—"

"I am—I am, Jacob," exclaimed the dying wretch: "but these tortures—why do they tear

my flesh with pincers?—why do they put hot skewers into my eyes? Doctor—doctor—take away the red-hot iron—lift me out of the fire—take me away, I say—save me—save me—I am in flames—I am burning—My God! I am burning!"

"Father—father," cried Jacob, in a tone of agonising appeal; "compose yourself—think of all your sins—repent—"

"Will no one snatch me from the fire?" yelled forth Old Death, writhing and tossing upon the bed in mortal pangs: "perdition seize ye, wretches—I am burning—I am in flames—my eyes scorch me—my flesh is all seared over with red-hot irons—Oh! it is hell—it is hell! Yes—I am in hell—My God! this is my punishment! Oh! send me back to the world again—let me retrieve the past—let me live my existence once more—I will be good—I will not sin! No—no—for hell is terrible—terrible—and these fires—Oh! horror—horror—snakes of flame have seized upon me—they are gnawing at my heart—they have thrust their fiery stings into my eyes—they wind themselves round and round me—horror—horror—there—I feel them now—Oh! mercy—mercy—mercy—mer—"

"This is frightful!" whispered Tom Rain to Dr.

Lascelles; and all the others present at the dreadful scene shuddered from head to foot.

Jacob Smith buried his face in his hands, and sobbed convulsively.

The dying man still continued to rave, and shriek, and yell for a short time longer; but his powers of articulation rapidly failed—his writhings grew less violent, until they ceased altogether,—and in a few minutes, the dark spirit which had never spared and never pitied human creature, fled for ever!

CHAPTER CXVII.

AN EXPLANATORY CONVERSATION.

THREE days had elapsed since that eventful evening on which so many exciting incidents occurred; and the scene now changes to the dwelling of Dr. Lascelles in Grafton Street.

It was about four in the afternoon; and the physician was seated in his study, Lord Ellingham being his companion at the time.

"At length, my dear doctor," said the nobleman, "you have found leisure to accord me an hour to give me those explanations which my afflicted brother feels himself incapable to enter into at present. The loss of Tamar, whose funeral is to take place the day after tomorrow, has proved almost a mortal blow to his generous heart: but the kindness of Mr. de Medina and Esther, who insisted upon having him with them at Finchley, must in some degree mitigate his grief. And yet, alas! that bereaved father and mourning sister have themselves such bitter need of solace! Just heaven! it was a frightful catastrophe!"

"And the murderer perished in a frightful manner," added the physician. "But now that the excitement created by these appalling events, and by all the other circumstances which Old Death's crime was the means of bringing to light, has somewhat subsided,—not only in respect to the public, but likewise with regard to the minds of those persons privately interested in the whole affair,—we may venture to converse upon the topic in the hope of approaching it with some degree of calmness. In the first place, my dear Arthur, tell me how you fared with the Home Secretary—I mean, give me the details of your visit to that Minister."

"On my arrival at his official residence," said the Earl, "on the dreadful night in question, I sent up my card with a message soliciting an immediate and private audience; and the favour was instantaneously granted. In as succinct a manner as possible, I explained to the Minister all that it was necessary to communicate. I told him that Thomas Rainford, who had been doomed to death and publicly executed, had survived the frightful ordeal of the scaffold; but relative to the means or the agents of his resurrection, I proffered no explanation—and none was demanded of me. The Minister instantly recollected the circumstance of having signed a full and complete pardon on behalf of Rainford, some weeks ago, and at the intercession of the King; and, doubtless knowing well the wayward character of George the Fourth, he perhaps thought that the less he enquired into the business, the better. I then gave him as much information relative to the recent proceedings of Rainford as was known to myself; and when the Minister heard that he was the individual who had played so mysterious a part in the affair of Torrens, his brow

lowered. But I immediately showed him the document signed by George the Fourth; and I gave him to understand that Rainford was acquainted with such proofs of the King's profligacy and unprincipled character, as would positively compromise the safety of the throne if they were published. This species of threat I was compelled to hold out, inasmuch as the Home Secretary seemed inclined to permit matters to take their course without any interference on his part. But, when he heard that the King had given that solemn acknowledgment of obligation in order to hush up some affair of which he was ashamed and likewise seriously alarmed, the Minister intimated his readiness to do any thing I required to avoid a scandal that might compromise his royal master. He nevertheless urged that an immense excitement had already been created in the metropolis, and which would of course spread to the provinces, by the sudden discovery that Thomas Rainford had not only escaped the scaffold, but had actually taken upon himself the functions of a judge in disposing of the murderers of Sir Henry Courtenay, according to his own caprice and will. '*In fact,*' said the Minister, '*the public will imagine that Rainford himself was an accomplice in the assassination of the baronet; and every one will ask what has been done with the two men, Splint and Pedler, who have thus been spirited away.*'—To this I could only reply that I was well assured of Rainford's complete innocence in respect to the murder of Sir Henry Courtenay; that he had adopted certain opinions relative to the reformation of criminals, and had chosen to test his system by applying it to those men; that the men were no longer in the country, but whither they had been sent I knew full well Rainford would never divulge to the Government; and that the Minister must decide between two alternatives—namely, whether he would dare public opinion in the case, or whether he would have his royal master seriously compromised. I can assure you, my dear doctor, that it gave me great pain and was most repugnant to my feelings to be compelled to hold out any menace of this kind; but could I leave a stone unturned that would serve the interest of my generous half-brother?"

"You already to some extent know the motives which induced Rainford to return to England instead of proceeding to America, and adopt the disguise under the cloak of which he broke up Old Death's gang?" said the physician, enquiringly.

"I gathered a few rapid and broken details from the Medinas, during the ride from Finchley to Red Lion Street, on that fatal evening when Jacob Smith came to the Manor, where I happened to be at the time, to announce the awful event which had occurred," replied the Earl. "But you may readily believe that both Mr. de Medina and Esther were too profoundly afflicted to be able to give me any very minute explanations. Moreover, I was myself so terribly excited, and so full of serious apprehensions—"

"I understand—'t was quite natural," interrupted the doctor. "But pray proceed with your narrative of the interview with the Secretary of State."

"I have little more to say upon that subject," observed Lord Ellingham. "The Minister balanced for some minutes between the alternatives which I submitted to him, and it was evident that he felt deeply grieved and chagrined at the consequences of the royal indiscretions,—indiscretions which had led the King to sign two important papers, both seriously affecting the proper and legitimate course of justice. But, in the end, he yielded to the alternative which was fav-

curable to our wishes; and, placing himself at his desk, he wrote the order to set Thomas Rainford free, which I delivered to the Bow Street officers on my return to Red Lion Street shortly after midnight."

"It is therefore certain that no farther apprehensions need be entertained on that head?" enquired the physician.

"None," answered the Earl of Ellingham. "The Coroner's Inquest, which sate upon the bodies of Tamar and Benjamin Bones yesterday, elicited, as you are well aware, the fact that the old man had been imprisoned by Rainford, and visited first by Esther, and on the last and fatal occasion by her unfortunate sister, merely with a view to his reformation and redemption from a course of crime—"

"And, therefore," added the physician, "public opinion is actually in favour of Rainford at this moment. But how happened it that Lady Hatfield was enabled to procure that document which conferred a full pardon upon him?"

"That woman possesses a most generous—a most noble heart!" exclaimed the Earl. "The voluptuous monarch sought to render her the victim of his lust; and it suddenly struck her, when his designs became unmistakably apparent, that she might avail herself of the circumstance to perform an act calculated to exhibit her sincere friendship for me. She accordingly affected to yield in a certain measure to his disgusting overtures: she overcame the natural scruples of a pure soul, so far as to give vague promises and encourage the King's passion, in order to obtain from him the document which she required. And she succeeded. But, on the occasion of that interview with the King at which he presented her with the precious paper, she was nearly falling a victim to her generous conduct and to his brutal violence. An extraordinary combination of circumstances, however, had led Rainford into the palace on that very evening; and accident enabled him not only to deliver Georgiana from the power of the King, but likewise to extort from his Majesty that written promise of deep obligation which has proved so vitally important to his interests."

"The entire affair is truly romantic," observed the doctor. "And now you wish me to give you in detail an explanation of all Rainford's late proceedings?"

"I am already acquainted with much concerning them, and conjecture enables me to comprehend more," returned the nobleman: "at the same time, I should be pleased to hear a connected account from your lips."

"It is by no means a disagreeable task for me to narrate incidents which prove the existence of so many generous traits in the heart of that man whom I was the means of restoring to life and to the world," said Dr. Lascelles; "for since that day on which he opened his eyes in my laboratory, I have regarded him almost in the light of a son. I must begin by informing you that Rainford was deeply touched by a conversation which he had with you, relative to the miseries and crimes of the poor and ignorant classes of society—"

"That conversation took place in the evening following his resuscitation," observed Arlur,—"the same evening on which I captured Benjamin Bones, as he was ascending from the subterranean."

"The discourse which yourself and your half-brother had together on that occasion," resumed the doctor, "induced him to reflect profoundly upon the nature of crime—the circumstances which engender, and afterwards encourage it—and the best modes of producing a reformation. That train of thought led him to ponder upon other matters, essentially regarding yourself.

For he saw that Benjamin Bones would prove your most implacable enemy: he knew that old man's character well—and he felt assured that he would devise and carry into effect some atrocious schemes of vengeance against you. These convictions filled Rainford's mind with the gloomiest apprehensions, although he contrived to veil them from you. He trembled lest you should fall into the snares which that incarnate fiend—God forgive me for speaking ill of the dead—was certain to spread at your feet; and he resolved to adopt some means to counteract the effects of that man's malignant spite. In a word, he determined, at any sacrifice, to watch over that brother who had acted so generously and nobly towards him. But not to a soul did he communicate his ideas, until he had safely embarked, with Tamar, Jacob Smith, and Charley Watts, on board the American packet-ship at Havre-de-Grace. Then he revealed his intentions to Tamar; and she immediately fell into his views—for she knew no will save his own. The captain of the ship consented, for a reward, to touch at Guernsey; and there Rainford, his wife, the youth, and the boy, were landed in the middle of the night. The next morning, your half-brother and Caesar appeared in the disguise of blackamoors; and from Saint Peter's Port, the capital of the island, they sailed for Weymouth—Tamar with Charley Watts proceeding by way of Southampton. The rendezvous was London; and all Rainford's plans, so far as he could forecast them, were already arranged. On her arrival in the metropolis, Tamar immediately sent for her father and sister to the inn at which she alighted; and to them she communicated her husband's design. It was of course necessary to keep the entire scheme concealed from yourself; as it was well known that you would never rest until you had persuaded your brother to quit the country again, were you aware of his return. At that time you were not engaged to Esther; and she had therefore no hesitation in maintaining this much of duplicity towards you. Subsequently—I mean, after your engagement together—she felt herself bound still to guard inviolably a secret that had your welfare as its basis. Well, then, Mr. de Medina and Esther lent themselves to the project—and cheerfully too, because they recognised all the importance of allowing Rainford to adopt the necessary measures to ensure your complete safety. Tamar and Charley Watts accordingly took up their abode at Finchley Manor, the proper precautions being taken to enable them to dwell there in the strictest privacy, and the fidelity of the servants being well assured in respect to their presence at that house. So far all proceeded satisfactorily; and in the meantime Rainford, accompanied by Jacob Smith, whom he named Caesar, arrived in London. You may conceive my surprise when one evening, having been informed by my servant that an East Indian gentleman was waiting to see me in the drawing-room, I proceeded to that apartment and found myself in the presence of Thomas Rainford! I did not recognise him at once; but he speedily made himself known to me; and, when his plans were developed, I readily agreed to aid him in their accomplishment. As he had expected and indeed calculated, I had full and complete control over the houses in Red Lion and Turnmill Streets; and he felt convinced that you would never think of visiting them. You had purchased them merely to deprive Benjamin Bones of the power of plunging his victims into the subterranean cells; and you allowed me the use of the premises for my laboratory. Under all these circumstances, the house in Red Lion Street

was the best suited to Rainford's designs; and it was speedily furnished in a suitable manner. The neighbours believed that a retired East Indian merchant had taken the place; and therefore no surprise—no excitement was occasioned, when they perceived that the new tenant had his private carriage and numerous dependants. But how did Rainford manage to obtain the assistance of several faithful persons, who were blindly obedient to his will, and to one of whom—named Wilton—he entrusted his entire history? They were all poor and deserving persons whom I knew well—men who had at different times been my patients, and in whom I felt an interest. Thus, in a very few days, the most complete arrangements were effected; and just at the moment when Rainford was prepared to commence operations, and when he had succeeded in tracing the abode of Benjamin Bones, chance threw him in the way of a certain John Jeffreys, whom he resolved to render subservient to his purposes in uprooting the atrocious gang."

The physician then proceeded to relate the manner in which Rainford had drawn Jeffreys into his service,—the revelations made to him by that individual's unfolding all the dreadful schemes of vengeance contemplated by Old Death, and directed against the happiness of the Earl himself,—the projected exhumation of the coffin in Saint Luke's church-yard, and the ferocious idea of blinding Lady Hatfield and Esther de Medina,—the mode in which these diabolical aims were frustrated by the arrest of all the members of Old Death's gang,—and the faithful conduct of Jeffreys. Dr. Lascelles also narrated the proceedings of Rainford in the difficult affair of Mr. Torrens,—how, disguised as an old man, and admirably sustaining that character, he had entrapped Sir Christopher Blunt to the house in Red Lion Street to preside at the examination of the two prisoners,—and how he (Dr. Lascelles) had become a party to that transaction,—all of which particulars are well known to the reader. Finally, the physician made the Earl acquainted with the nature and the results of the system of information applied to all the members of the gang,—how it had succeeded in respect to Tolmarsh, the Bunce, Podder and Splint,—and how Esther de Medina had deputed her unfortunate sister to visit Benjamin Bones on that fatal evening which was characterised by a savage murder!

There was only one point connected with Rainford's affairs, on which the Earl and the physician did not touch; and this was the parentage of little Charley Watts. The doctor was unacquainted with the fact that Rainford had some years back forcibly violated the person of Lady Hatfield, and that the issue of this crime was the boy who still bore the name by which we have just called him. The Earl of Ellingham naturally veiled the circumstance even from a friend so intimate and sincere as Lascelles; and though the doctor knew that Lady Hatfield had been a mother, he also kept this knowledge to himself, and was very far from suspecting the true history of Charley Watts. Lascelles, it will be remembered, had made the discovery relative to Georgiana on that occasion when he attended her in her severe illness, and when he gave her a soporific, as recorded in the early part of this work: but he had never mentioned that discovery to a soul;—and the Earl of Ellingham was as far from supposing that Lady Hatfield's loss of chastity was known to the physician, as the physician was from entertaining even the remotest idea relative to the parentage of the boy.

But Rainford was already aware that this boy was his own son—the issue of the outrage which he had perpetrated upon Lady Hatfield! Yes—on the evening before this interview between the Earl of Ellingham and Dr. Lascelles, the former had so far intruded upon his brother's profound grief, as to make to him a revelation which a sense of duty forbade him to delay. Rainford also learnt, at the same time, that Georgiana was herself acquainted with the fact of her child being in his care—placed under his protection as it were by the inscrutable decrees of Providence! But for the sake of the honour of Lady Hatfield, and sparing Rainford from the necessity of giving unpleasant and degrading explanations to his friends, it had been determined between Lord Ellingham and himself that the boy should still continue to bear the name of Watts, and that his real parentage should be unacknowledged—at least for the present.

In order not to dwell with tedious minuteness upon this portion of our narrative, we shall briefly state that the funeral of Tamar took place on the day appointed; and if the tears of heart-felt grief streaming from the eyes of true mourners can avail for the souls of the departed, then the spirit of the murdered Jewess must have received ample solace and full propitiation in those regions to which it had taken wing!

But how deep a gloom had fallen upon the family of Medina;—and how poignant was the anguish which the bereaved father and sister experienced for the departed!

Nor less acute was the sorrow of the husband who survived that fair but prematurely crushed flower of Israel;—for immense was thy love for her, Tom Rain!

CHAPTER CXVIII.

THE INSOLVENT DEBTORS' COURT.

PASSING through Portugal Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields, you may perceive a low, dingy-looking building, protected by a row of tall iron railings, and with steps leading to the front entrance. This structure is of so dubious an aspect that it places the stranger in a profound state of uncertainty as to whether it be the lobby of a criminal prison or a Methodist chapel; and the supposed stranger is not a little surprised when he learns, on inquiry, that this architectural mystery is neither more nor less than the Court for the Relief of Insolvent Debtors.

At about nine o'clock in the morning the immediate vicinity of the Court begins to wear a very business-like appearance: that is to say, both sides of the street are thronged with the most curious specimens of human nature which it is possible to encounter outside of Newgate or of the Bench. The wonder is whence such a host of ill-looking fellows can have sprung, or whither they can be going, unless it is to either of the two places just named. Then comes the natural question, "But who are they?" The answer is at hand: some are the turnkeys of the County Prisons and the tipstaves of the Bench, having in their charge prisoners about to be heard at the Court,—others are the usual hangers-on and errand-seekers who are always to be found lurking about such places,—while a third set are the friends or else the opposing creditors of the Insolvents. The public-house opposite the Court, and the one at the side are also filled with persons of these descriptions; and before ten o'clock

in the morning many pots of porter are disposed of—many quarters of gin dispensed in two or three “outs”—and many screws of tobacco puffed off in smoke.

Inside the Court, business commences in somewhat a more serious manner. Four or five barristers take their places in a large box divided into two compartments like pews in a church: a couple of Commissioners seat themselves on a bench made in very humble imitation indeed of those in the Courts at Westminster;—a single reporter lounges into the snug crib so kindly allotted to the representatives of the press;—several attorneys and attorneys’ clerks gather round the table between the counsel’s seats and the bench;—the Insolvents are penned up altogether in a sort of human fold on the right as you go into the tribunal;—and at the back a crowd of unwashed faces rise amphitheatrically in the compartment appropriated to the audience. The Commissioners endeavour to look as much like the Judges of the Land as possible;—the barristers affect all the consequence and airs of Serjeants-at-Law or King’s Counsel;—the Insolvents try to seem as happy as if they had nothing awkward in their schedules to account for;—and the spectators raise heaven and earth to appear respectable: but each and all of these attempts are the most decided failures which it is possible to conceive. A general air of seediness pervades the place: the professional wigs are dirty and out of curl, and the forensic gowns threadbare;—and the disagreeable impression thus created on the mind of the visitor, is enhanced to no trifling degree by a sickly smell of perspiration combined with the stale odour of tobacco smoke retained in the garments of the audience.

Amongst the Insolvents were two individuals whose appearance formed a most striking contrast. These were Mr. Joshua Sheepshanks and Mr. Frank Curtis.

The former was dressed in deep black, with a white neck-cloth, and black cotton gloves a great deal too large for his hands: he had also put black crape round his hat, in the hope of creating the sympathy of the Commissioners by producing the impression of having sustained some serious and recent family loss. His sallow face was elongated with the awful sanctimoniousness which characterised it: his black hair was combed sleekly down over his forehead;—and he sat bolt upright on the hard bench, every now and then raising his eyes to heaven—or rather to the lanthorn on the roof of the Court—as if in silent prayer.

Mr. Frank Curtis was attired in his habitually flash manner; and as he lolled back in his seat, he now and then bestowed a significant wink upon his attorney at the table, or exchanged a few familiar observations with the tipstaff, whom he had treated to egg-hot at the public-house opposite before they entered the Court.

But where was Captain O’Blunderbuss? Had he deserted his friend on this trying occasion? Gentle reader, do not suppose for an instant that the gallant officer was capable of what he himself would describe to be the “most bastely maneness”—so long as Frank had a shilling left in his pocket, or the ability to raise one! The captain, then, *was* there—and in the vicinity of Mr. Curtis; for the terrible Irishman had posted himself as near as possible to the box in which the Insolvents stand to be examined—in the first place, that when Frank should mount to that “bad eminence,” he might be close by to encourage him with his looks; and, in the second place, he had taken that particular stand as the one whence he could best dart ferocious glances at the Commissioners, in case these

functionaries should take it into their heads to deal harshly with his friend.

And now the business of that day’s proceeding commenced; and the Clerk of the Court bawled out in a loud tone—“Joshua Sheepshanks!”

“Here, my Christian friend!” groaned the religious gentleman, drawing himself slowly up to his full, thin, lanky height, and beginning to move slowly and solemnly towards the box above-mentioned.

“Now, then—Joshua Sheepshanks!” cried the clerk, in a sharp tone.

“Come—Joshua Sheepshanks—look alive!” grumbled the official who administers the oaths to the Insolvents.

“Cut along, old fellow,” whispered Frank Curtis, giving the sanctimonious dissenter a hearty pinch on the leg as he passed by.

Mr. Sheepshanks uttered a low moan—cast up his eyes towards the lanthorn—muttered something about his having “fallen amongst the ungodly”—and ended by hoisting himself into the box with some degree of alacrity, his slow movements having rendered the Court impatient.

“Does any counsel appear for you, Joshua Sheepshanks?” demanded the clerk.

“None—unless it be the Lord’s will that I should be supported by divine grace,” answered the dissenting minister, in so doleful a tone and with such a solemn shaking of the head that the whole Court was alarmed lest he was about to go off in a fit.

“I appear to oppose on behalf of several creditors,” said Mr. Bulliwell, one of the leading barristers practising in that Court.

“Oh! the persevering bitterness of those rancorous men!” exclaimed Mr. Sheepshanks, clasping his hands together, and turning up the whites of his eyes in an appalling fashion.

“Silence, Insolvent!” cried the clerk, in a sharp tone.

Meantime, the Commissioners had both been taking a long and simultaneous stare at the religious gentleman; and though one was purblind and the other in his dotage, they nevertheless seemed to arrive in the long run at pretty well the same conclusion—which was, that Mr. Sheepshanks was a dreadful humbug. The glances they interchanged through their spectacles expressed to each other this conviction; and the sharper of the two, who rejoiced in the name of Sneesby, forthwith proceeded to examine the schedule.

“I see that you were once a missionary in the *South-Sea Islands Bible Circulating Society*, Insolvent?” said this learned functionary.

“Under the divine favour, I was such a vessel in the good cause,” answered Mr. Sheepshanks, with the invariable nasal twang of hypocrisy.

“A what?” demanded Mr. Commissioner Sneesby, in an impatient tone.

“He says he was a *vessel*, sir,” observed Mr. Bulliwell, the barrister. “It is a word much in vogue amongst the religious world.”

“Oh! the Insolvent calls himself a vessel—does he?” exclaimed the Commissioner. “Well—he has come to a pretty anchorage at last.”

“And yet, sir, I can assure you he is no anchorite,” said Mr. Bulliwell.

These were jokes on the part of the Commissioner and the counsel; and therefore the attorneys, the clerks, and the audience tittered, as in duty bound when the wig forgot its wisdom and indulged in wit; and the Insolvents all laughed too—but for another

reason. In fact, Mr. Frank Curtis had applied his right hand to his nose, and extended it in a fan-like form—or, in other words, he “took a sight” at the learned Commissioner, and worked an imaginary coffee-mill at the same time with his left hand.

Order being restored, the business proceeded.

“And, having been a missionary, I observe by your schedule, that you turned a Dissenting Minister, Insolvent?” said Mr. Commissioner Sneesby, interrogatively.

“I was a brand snatched from the burning, sir,” replied Mr. Sheepshanks; “and, having sorely wrestled with Satan——”

“Give me a direct answer, man!” cried the Commissioner, sharply. “Did you leave an institution connected with the Established Church and become a dissenter?”

“Heaven so willed it,” responded the sanctimonious insolvent, in a droning voice: “I had a call—and I obeyed it.”

“Who opposes this man?” enquired the Commissioner.

“Jeremiah Chubbly!” vociferated the Clerk of the Court.

“Here!” growled a man dressed as a bricklayer.

“Now, then, Jeremiah Chubbly—stand up in the witness-box,” continued the clerk.

“Come, Mr. Chubbly—make haste,” said Mr. Bulliwell, the barrister, speaking more civilly and using the honorary prefix of *Mister*, because he had been retained by the individual to whom he applied it.

Mr. Chubbly mounted the witness-box; and while the oath was being administered to him, both the Commissioners inflicted a long stare on his countenance just to satisfy themselves by this physiognomical scrutiny whether he were a trust-worthy person or not;—for Commissioners in the Insolvents’ Court are great physiognomists—very great physiognomists indeed.

“Your name is Jeremiah Chubbly?” said Mr. Bulliwell, rising in a stately manner, and darting a ferocious glance towards Mr. Sheepshanks, as much as to say—“Now, my man, I am going to elicit things against you that will prove you to be the greatest rogue in existence.”

“Yes—my name be Chubbly, sir,” answered the opposing creditor. “But I paid you to tackle that there sneaking-looking chap over there, and not to ke-vestion me.”

“My dear sir,” said Mr. Bulliwell, blandly, “this is the way of conducting an opposition where counsel is employed. Your name is Jeremiah Chubbly; and you are a master-bricklayer, I believe?”

“I told ‘ee so a week ago,” replied the opposing creditor, savagely.

“Yes—yes: but you must tell the learned Commissioners all over again what you told me,” gently remonstrated Mr. Bulliwell. “I believe you are the proprietor of a chapel in the Tottenham Court Road?”

“Yes—I be, sir,” responded Mr. Chubbly. “I built she—and a stronger, better, or more comfortabler place of washup you would n’t find in all London—leastways, barrin’ St. Paul’s.”

“Well—and this chapel was to let some three or four months ago, I believe?” continued Mr. Bulliwell.

“Yes—it were, sir: and I had blackguards up at the grocer’s round the corner——”

“Had what, man?” demanded the Commissioners simultaneously, and as it were in the same breath.

“He means that he put placards up at a neighbour-

ing grocer’s, sir,” mildly explained Mr. Bulliwell; then, turning again to the opposing creditor, the learned counsel said, “And I believe that the Insolvent was attracted by the placards, and applied to you in consequence?”

“He come round to my house, sir, jest as me and my missus was a sitting down to dinner,” answered Mr. Chubbly. “It was biled pork and greens we had, I remember; cos says I to my missus, says I——”

“Well—well, Mr. Chubbly,” interrupted the counsel: “we will proceed, if you please. The Insolvent came round to you, and enquired about the chapel that was to let?”

“Yes—he did; and he axed a many ke-vestions about the orgin and the pulpit, and the westry—and so on.”

“And, being satisfied with your replies, he agreed to take the chapel?”

“Yes—and to pay a ke-varter in advance, which was eleven pound ten,” answered Mr. Chubbly.

“Well—what took place next?” inquired one of the Commissioners, growing impatient, while his brother-judge took a nap.

“Please, my lud, he sits down and pitches into the biled pork and greens,” responded the opposing creditor.

There was a laugh amongst the audience; but as the joke did not arise from either the bench or the bar, the ushers bawled out “Silence!” as loudly as they could.

“The Insolvent, I believe, not only omitted to pay the quarter in advance,” said Mr. Bulliwell, “but succeeded in obtaining from you the loan of forty pounds?”

“In hard cash—and that’s what aggerewates me and my missus so agin him,” replied the opposing creditor.

“But in what manner did he obtain those forty pounds?” asked Mr. Bulliwell. “Tell the learned Commissioners——”

“Vy—one on ‘em’s asleep—and so it’s no use a-speaking to he!” exclaimed Mr. Chubbly.

There was another laugh, which the clerks and ushers immediately suppressed; and Captain O’Blunderbuss ran a narrow risk of being ignominiously bundled out of the Court for observing in a tone somewhat above a whisper, “Be Jasus! and that’s as thrue as that every rale Irishman loves potheen!” But the best of the business was that the somnolent Commissioner woke up; and catching the fag end of a laugh accompanied by the loud cries of “Silence!” on the part of the officials of the Court, he immediately fancied that some person had perpetrated a great breach of decorum, and exclaimed in a severe tone, “Whoever is the cause of disturbance must be turned out.” Hereupon there was another laugh; and even Mr. Bulliwell himself was compelled to stoop down and pretend to examine his brief in order to conceal the mobility of his risible muscles.

“Come, come—let the business proceed,” said Commissioner Sneesby, anxious to relieve his brother-functionary from any farther embarrassment; for the latter learned gentleman was quite bewildered by the renewed hilarity which his words had provoked.

“Tell the bench how the Insolvent obtained from you the forty pounds, Mr. Chubbly,” exclaimed Mr. Bulliwell.

“Please, sir—my missus has on’y got von eye——”

“Well—and what has that to do with it?” demanded Mr. Commissioner Sneesby.

“Jest this, my lud—that that ‘ere sneaking feller

got on the blind side of she, and began a pitching into she all kind of gammon,—calling his-self a chosen vessel, and telling her how she would be sartin sure of going to heaven if we on'y let him have the funds to set up in business as a preacher. He swore that all the aristocracy was a-dying to hear him in the pulpit: and so he persuades my missus to be pew-opener; and he gammons me to call myself a Helder."

"A what?" exclaimed Commissioner Sneesby.

"An Elder, sir," observed Mr. Bulliwell: for it is to be remarked that when Judges at Westminster or Commissioners in Portugal Street cannot understand any thing—or affect not to do so—the counsel are always prepared to give them an explanation;—yet when these counsel become Judges or Commissioners in their turn, they grow just as opaque of intellect and as slow of comprehension as those whom they were once accustomed to enlighten.

"Well—go on, man," said Commissioner Sneesby, addressing himself to the opposing creditor.

"Well, my lud," proceeded Mr. Chubbly, "that there sniggering feller come over us all in sich a way with his blessed insinuations, that we all thought him a perfect saint; and we was glad to wipe off the dust of sich a man's shoes, as the sayin' is. So I goes to my friend Cheesewright, the grocer, and I says, says I, 'Cheesey, my boy, you must be a Helder, too.' So Cheesewright axes what a Helder is; and when I tells him that it's to pürside over a chapel in which a reglar saint holds forth, and that all Helders is booked for the right place in t'other world, he says, says he, 'Chubbly, my boy, tip us your fist; and I'm your man for a Helder too.'"

"And now tell the learned Commissioners what this business has to do with your opposition to the Insolvent's discharge," said Mr. Bulliwell, seeing that the bench was growing impatient.

"Vy, my luds," continued Chubbly, scratching his head, "that there insinivating chap gets Cheesey to lend him his acceptance for thirty pounds, and he comes to me and gets me to write my name along the back on it—and so he gets it discounted, and leaves us to pay it."

Here Mr. Joshua Sheepshanks held up his hands and groaned aloud—as if in horrified dismay at the construction put upon his conduct.

"Silence, Insolvent!" exclaimed the usher, ferociously.

"And now, Mr. Chubbly," resumed Mr. Bulliwell, "what answer did you obtain from the Insolvent when you stated to him that you had heard certain reports which made you anxious to receive security for the rent of the chapel, the forty pounds, and the amount of the bill for which you were liable?"

"He said as how that the chapel had n't succeeded as he thought it would have done—that he'd been disappointed—and that me and Cheesewright must have patience."

"And when you told him that you and Mr. Cheesewright would not wait any longer—what did he say?"

"He said we was a generation of wipers."

"And when you put him into prison?"

"He sent for me, and said I must n't hope to be paid in this world; but as I'd laid up for myself a treasure in heaven, he expected me to let him out of quod for nothink."

There was a general titter in which bench and bar joined; and the only demure countenances present were those of the creditor who was done, and Mr. Sheepshanks who had done him. In fact this pious

gentleman was so overcome by the unpleasantness of his position, that he compared himself, in the religious anguish of his spirit, to the man who went down to Jericho and fell amongst thieves.

Silence being again restored, two other opposing creditors were examined in their turn; and their evidence went to prove that Mr. Joshua Sheepshanks had obtained from them a quantity of goods under such very questionable pretences, that he might think himself exceedingly fortunate in having been sent to the King's Bench instead of to Newgate.

The opposition having arrived at this stage, Mr. Bulliwell proceeded to address the Court in a long and furious speech based upon the testimony that had been given against the Insolvent. The agreeable appellations of "sanctimonious hypocrite," "double-faced ranter," "unprincipled trader in pious duplicities," and such like terms, were freely applied to Mr. Joshua Sheepshanks in the course of this oration. The learned gentleman dwelt bitterly—but not one atom more severely than the subject deserved—upon the rascally scoundrelism which is practised by those persons who are denominated "saints;" and he concluded a rather eloquent speech by praying the Court to express its sense of the Insolvent's criminality by remanding him for as long a period as the Act of Parliament would allow.

When called upon for any thing he might have to say in his defence, Mr. Sheepshanks applied a white handkerchief to his eyes; and, after shaking his head solemnly for several moments, he revealed his lugubrious countenance once more—purposely elongating it until he fancied he had tortured himself into as impressive a pitch of misery as one could wish to behold. He then began a tedious and doleful dissertation upon the "vanity of earthly things"—marvelled that his opposing creditors should "prefer the filthy lucre to the welfare of their immortal souls"—declared that when he first went amongst them he found them "lamentably benighted," but that he had "at one time brought them to a state of grace"—complained that they had treated him as if he had been "a vessey of wrath," whereas he flattered himself that he was in "a most savoury state of godliness"—hinted rather significantly that he looked upon his present predicament as a "glorious martyrdom in the good cause"—and wound up with an earnest prayer to the Commissioners that they would not be "moved by the men of Belial against him," but that even as "heaven tempered the wind to the shorn lamb," they would modify their judgment according to his lamentable condition.

To this speech, delivered in the most approved nasal twang of the dissenting pulpit, and with many doleful moans and frightful contortions, Commissioner Sneesby listened with exemplary patience: so, indeed, did his learned brother-judge—but in this latter case it was with the eyes shut. The moment, however, the harangue was brought to an end, the eyes alluded to opened slowly and gazed rather vacantly around: but with judicial keenness, they speedily comprehended the exact stage of the proceedings; and the possessor of the sleepy optics forthwith began to consult with his coadjutor in solemn whispers. Their conversation ran somewhat in the ensuing manner:—

"It is getting on for one o'clock, and I begin to feel quite faint," said the somniferous Commissioner.

"A chop and a glass of sherry will do us each good," observed Mr. Sneesby.

"Bulliwell does make such long-winded speeches!"

"Well—so he does: but I always pretend to listen to them—and thus he enjoys the reputation of having been of the Court."

"I am going to dine with Serjeant Splutterby this evening—and so," said Commissioner Sneesby, "I shall sit till six. But what are we to do with this canting hypocrite of an Insolvent?"

"Six months, I suppose: he is a dreadful villain."

"Yes—and while you were asleep he made a frightful long speech—"

"Oh! in that case, then, let us give him a twelve-month—and then for the chops and the sherry."

"Good: a twelve-month—and then the chops and the sherry."

Mr. Commissioner Sneesby, having thus assented to the suggestions of his sleepy coadjutor, turned in a solemn manner towards Mr. Joshua Sheepshanks and addressed that miserable-looking creature in the following terms:—

"Insolvent, the Court has maturely deliberated upon your case. We have listened with deep attention to the evidence of the opposing creditors and the address of the learned counsel on their behalf. We have likewise followed you with equal care throughout your defence; and we feel ourselves bound to pronounce an adverse judgment. Your conduct has been most reprehensible—aggravated, too, by the fact that your offences have been committed under the cloak of religion. My learned brother agrees with me in the opinion that your proceedings have been most fraudulent. We might even use harsher terms; but we will forbear. The judgment of the Court is that you, Joshua Sheepshanks, be remanded at the suit of your three opposing creditors for the period of twelve calendar months from the date of your vesting order."

"Stand down, Insolvent!" cried the clerk.

The discomfited Mr. Sheepshanks raised his eyes and hands upwards, and gave vent to a hollow groan, which made the audience think for a moment that it was a ghost from the tomb who was passing through the Insolvents' Court.

"Silence, Insolvent!" vociferated an official, making much more noise to enforce his command than the pious gentleman did in provoking the injunction.

"You must swear to your schedule," said the usher, as Mr. Sheepshanks was descending from the box.

"Damn the schedule!" muttered the reverend Insolvent, in a savage whisper.

"What do you say?" demanded the usher.

"I pray to heaven to have mercy upon my relentless persecutors, even as I forgive them!" answered Mr. Sheepshanks, with a solemn shake of the head.

He then quitted the box, and forthwith accompanied the tipstaff who had charge of him to the public-house opposite, where he drowned his cares in such a quantity of hot brandy-and-water, that the tipstaff aforesaid was compelled to put him into a cab and convey him back to the King's Bench in a desperate state of intoxication.

In the meantime the two Commissioners retired to partake of their chops and sherry: the learned counsel likewise withdrew to their private room, where they also refreshed themselves;—the attorneys stole away for a quarter of an hour:—and the audience took little portable dinners of saveloys and biscuits from their pocket-handkerchiefs, so that the compartment of the Court allotted to spectators suddenly appeared to have been transformed into a slap-bang shop on an inferior scale.

The fifteen minutes' grace having expired, Commissioners, counsel, and lawyers returned to their places—the audience wiped their mouths—and the Clerk of the Court called forth the name of "FRANK CURTIS!"

CHAPTER CXIX.

THE EXAMINATION OF MR. FRANK CURTIS.

CAPTAIN O'BLUNDERBUSS surveyed his friend with a degree of admiration amounting almost to envy, as the latter leapt nimbly into the box; but when the two Commissioners inflicted upon the Insolvent the simultaneous long stare which seemed to form a portion of the judicial proceedings, the gallant officer fixed upon those learned functionaries a look of the most ferocious menace,—muttering at the same time something about the "punching of heads." As for Mr. Frank Curtis, he returned the stare of the Commissioners in so deliberately impudent and yet good-humoured a manner that it was quite evident the physiognomical discrimination of the bench was at least for once completely set at naught. In plain terms, the Commissioners did not know what the dence to make of the young gentleman.

"I appear for the Insolvent, sir," said one of the learned counsel, Mr. Cadgerbreef by name.

"And I attend for an opposing creditor, sir," observed Mr. Bulliwell.

The Clerk of the Court handed up the schedule to the Commissioners, who occupied some minutes in looking over it, the document being somewhat a lengthy one.

"I see you have got upwards of a hundred and fifty creditors, Insolvent," said Mr. Commissioner Sneesby, fixing his eyes severely upon the youthful candidate for the process of white-washing.

"Be Jasus! and my frind's a jintleman—every inch of him!" cried Captain O'Blunderbuss: "and no jintleman could think of petitioning the Court with less than a hunthred and fifty creditors."

The whole Court was struck with dismay—the bench being perfectly aghast—at this interruption; while the captain stood as dauntless and menacing as if he seriously contemplated the challenging of Commissioners, learned counsel, lawyers, and all. Even the usher was so astounded by his conduct that he forgot to bawl out his usual noisy cry for silence.

"Who is this person?" enquired Mr. Commissioner Sneesby, turning towards his brother-judge, as if the latter knew any better than himself.

"Person, be Jasus! Do n't call me a person," vociferated the gallant gentleman, stamping his martial foot heavily upon the floor. "Is it me name ye'd be ather finding out? If so, I'll hand ye my car-r-d—and you'll find that I'm Capthain O'Bluntherbuss, of Bluntherbuss Park, Connemar-r-ra, Ir-r-reland!" added the Insolvent's bosom-friend, rattling the r in such an appalling manner that it seemed as if a waggon laden with iron bars was passing through the Court.

"Turn him out!" exclaimed Mr. Commissioner Sneesby.

"Be Jasus! and it'll take tin of ye to do that!" ejaculated the captain, taking so firm and dauntless a stand that he appeared literally nailed to the ground. "But we'll make a compromise, if ye plaze—and that is, I'll hould my tongue."



"You had better, sir," said the Commissioner: then, perceiving that none of the officials seemed inclined to assail the impregnable front which the ferocious Irishman presented, he thought it prudent to pass over the interruption and continue the business before the Court. "Who attends to oppose?" he accordingly demanded.

"Me!" ejaculated a little, dapper-looking, flashily-dressed person, elbowing his way through the crowd behind the barristers' seats, and getting his glossy beaver smashed flat as an opera hat in the desperate struggle: indeed, what with the smell of onions from one man and tobacco from another,—what with the squeezing, and pushing, and crushing—the treading on toes, and the danger of having one's coat slit up the back or one's pocket picked,—it is no easy nor pleasant matter to transform oneself into a human wedge to be applied to such a stubborn, compact mass as a multitude in a Court of Justice.

At last, however, the little man succeeded in reaching the witness-box,—but not without being compelled to smart under the disagreeable conviction that the studied elegance of his toilette was entirely marred—his shirt-frill tumbled, his white waistcoat soiled

through contact with a coal-heaver, and all the polish trodden off his boots.

Adjusting himself as well as he could in the box, he made a profound bow to the bench, simpered in a familiar fashion towards his counsel, glanced complacently at the attorneys, and then turned a look of indignant contempt upon the Insolvent,—so that the little gentleman's transitions from execruting politeness to extreme hauteur were very interesting indeed.

"Your name is Kicksey Fopperton, I believe?" said Mr. Bulliwell, the opposing creditor's own counsel, specially retained and fee'd for the purpose of getting Mr. Frank Curtis remanded during as lengthened a period as possible.

"That is my name, sir," was the answer, delivered with a bland smile and a half bow.

"What are you, Mr. Fopperton?"

"A tailor by trade, sir;—for persons of Mr. Fopperton's calling never describe themselves briefly as 'tailors,' but always as 'tailors by trade.'"

"A tailor by trade," repeated Mr. Bulliwell. "And you carry on business—"

"In Regent Street, sir," replied Mr. Fopperton, glancing towards the bench to notice what effect such

a fashionable address had produced upon the Commissioners; but one was desirous, and the other seemed to be looking at nothing—just as horses appear when they are standing idle.

"In Regent Street," repeated Mr. Bulliwell. "And I believe the Insolvent called upon you, and ordered clothes to a considerable amount."

"I have supplied him for the last three years," answered Mr. Fopperton, "and never yet saw the colour of his money."

"You never yet saw the colour of his money. But he has seen the colour of yours, though?"

"I have discounted bills for him to the amount of a thousand pounds."

"To the amount of a thousand pounds. Now, on what pretence—or rather, under what circumstances did the Insolvent introduce himself to you?" inquired Mr. Bulliwell.

"He drove up to my door in a dashing gig, sir," answered Mr. Fopperton, "leapt down, rushed in, and enquired if his friend the Archbishop of Canterbury had been waiting there for him? I assured him that his Grace had not visited the shop, to my knowledge, in all his life. '*God bless me!*' exclaimed Mr. Curtis; '*I must have made a mistake, then! But don't you make the leather breeches which his Grace wears when he goes out hunting?*' I replied that I never made leather breeches at all. '*Nor galligaskins?*' said Mr. Curtis. '*Nor galligaskins, sir,*' I said. '*Then blow me tight,*' says he, '*I have come to the wrong shop. My intimate and particular friend the Archbishop of York—*' I suggested '*Canterbury.*'—'*Canterbury I meant!*' exclaimed Mr. Curtis: '*his Grace promised to introduce me to his own tailor; and he's have I been promising introductions likewise to Lord Pimpleby and the Marquis of Dublin, and a whole lot of my fashionable friends. There is a perfect rage all on a sudden to employ his Grace's tailor!*'—I was struck by all this fine-sounding talk, and handed Mr. Curtis my card. '*Egad!*' said he, laughing, '*I've a precious good mind to have a lark, and pit you against his Grace's tailor. My eyes! what fun it would be!*'"

"And it ended by the Insolvent actually putting you in competition with the imaginary tailor which he had conjured up?" enquired Mr. Bulliwell.

"Just so, sir," returned Mr. Fopperton; "and though I heard sometime afterwards that Mr. Curtis received a handsome income from his uncle Sir Christopher Blunt, yet I never got a sixpence."

"Be Jusus! Sir Christopher-r is a regular ould screw!" ejaculated Captain O'Blunderbuss.

"Eh?—what?" cried the Commissioners, the one awaking from his nap and the other from his obliviousness.

"Is it afther distur-r-bing ye I've been again?" demanded the gallant gentleman: "then, be the holy poker-r! I ask your pardon—and I'll hould my pace!"

With these words the captain put his arms akimbo—pursed up his mouth in a most extraordinary fashion—and stood as still as a post and as demure as a methodist parson, to the huge delight of the unwashed audience.

"It appears," said Mr. Bulliwell, resuming his examination of the opposing creditor, "that the Insolvent obtained clothes to the amount of four hundred pounds, and cash to the amount of a thousand?"

Mr. Fopperton bowed an assent.

"And you have every reason to believe that he only talked about the Archbishop's tailor and his noble acquaintances, in order to throw dust into your eyes?"

"To make a fool of me, sir," cried Mr. Kitekey Fopperton.

"To make a fool of you," repeated Mr. Bulliwell.

"An! an ass of me, sir!" ejaculated the tailor, with indignation.

"And an ass of you," echoed the learned counsel.

"Yes, sir—and to make a stupid old owl of me!" vociferated Mr. Fopperton.

"A stupid old owl of you," still repeated Mr. Bulliwell, in the most matter-of-fact style possible; then, perceiving that his client had exhausted alike his reproaching epithets and his breath, the learned counsel sat down.

Thereupon up rose Mr. Cadgerbreef, who had been retained for the defence of the Insolvent; and as he pulled his gown over his shoulders and prepared to cross-examine the opposing creditor, Captain O'Blunderbuss turned partially round, and forming an arch with his hand on one side of his mouth, said, in a pretty loud tone however, "Be Jusus! and if ye don't make mince mate of him, it's meself that'll skin him alive!"

The learned counsel nodded his head in a significant manner, as much as to say, "Just wait a moment—and you shall see how I'll serve him;"—and the gallant captain appeared satisfied with the tacit promise thus conveyed.

"Now, Mr. Fopperton," cried Mr. Cadgerbreef, who was considered to be particularly skilful in badgering and baiting an opposing creditor, "you'll be so kind as to remember that you are upon your oath;" and the learned counsel glanced towards the bench, as much as to intimate that the Commissioners were keeping a sharp look out on him, the opposing creditor aforesaid, and would send him to Newgate without remorse at the least symptom of perjury that might transpire.

Mr. Fopperton cast his eyes timidly in the same direction; and it was no doubt some satisfaction to him to observe that the sleepy Commissioner was fast asleep, and that the other was just going off into a doze.

"Well, Mr. Fopperton," exclaimed Mr. Cadgerbreef, in a very loud and very overbearing tone, "so you have come to oppose the Insolvent's discharge—have you? Now answer me this question: have you ever been in that box yourself?" pointing at the same time in a resolute and determined manner towards the place occupied by Mr. Curtis.

"Am I bound to answer that question?" asked Mr. Fopperton, becoming considerably crest-fallen all on a sudden, and appealing meekly to his own counsel.

"I am afraid you must," returned Mr. Bulliwell.

"Well, then, sir—I have had the misfortune to pass through this Court," said the fashionable tailor, his countenance growing excessively blank.

"You have been insolvent," exclaimed Mr. Cadgerbreef. "Now, sir, how often have you petitioned the Court and been discharged from your liabilities through the proceedings of this Court?"

"Really, sir—I—I—" stammered the West-End tailor, becoming awfully red in the face.

"Shall I repeat the question, sir?" demanded the learned counsel, affecting a politeness that was even more galling than his severity had been.

"You had better answer, Mr. Fopperton," said Mr. Bulliwell.

"I can't say—that is—not exactly——"

"Oh! very well—then we shall see!" cried Mr. Cadgerbreef, taking up a pen, dipping it deep into the ink, and making believe that he was about to take

down the answers to be given to his questions—so as to catch the opposing creditor out perjuring himself, if possible: “will you swear, Mr. Fopperton, that you have not been insolvent seven times?”

“Yes, sir—I will swear to that,” returned the tailor, with alacrity.

“You will swear. Well—will you swear that you have not been insolvent five times?”

“Yes, sir—I will swear to that too.”

“You will swear to that, too. Now mind what you’re about, Mr. Fopperton: take care what you say,” cried Mr. Cadgerbreef, in a tone of awful menace. “Will you swear that you have not been insolvent three times?”

“No, sir—I—I can’t swear to that,” answered the tailor, looking very miserable.

“You can’t swear to that. Now, can you deny it?”

“No, sir—I cannot,” said Mr. Fopperton.

“You cannot,” repeated Mr. Cadgerbreef, casting a glance at Captain O’Blunderbuss, which seemed to say, “I have him now!”—then, again addressing himself to the opposing creditor, he exclaimed in a domineering, browbeating manner, “Take care what you are about, Mr. Fopperton;—and now tell me whether you have not been bankrupt, as well as insolvent, several times.”

“No—only once bankrupt,” cried Mr. Fopperton, impatiently.

“Well—once bankrupt—and enough too, when coupled with three insolvencies!” said the learned gentleman, in a tone which very significantly implied his belief that the opposing creditor was the greatest scoundrel in the universe. “And pray how much have you ever paid in the shape of dividend, sir?”

“I really can’t say at this moment: I—”

“Oh! you can’t—can’t you!” cried Mr. Cadgerbreef: “then I’ll see if I can refresh your memory;”—and, taking out of his pocket a letter from some friend or relation, he pretended to examine it with very great attention, as if it contained some damning testimony relative to Mr. Fopperton’s dealings—although, in reality, it had no more connexion with him or his affairs than with the man in the moon.

“I think I recollect now, sir,” said the West-End tailor, getting frightened: “I—I—”

“Well, sir—can you answer my question?” demanded Mr. Cadgerbreef, laying his fore-finger on the letter in a marked and formal manner, just as if he were pointing to the very paragraph which furnished all requisite information respecting the tailor. “I will repeat it again for you: how much have you ever paid, collectively and under all your numerous insolvencies and frequent bankruptcies, in the shape of dividend?”

“Two-pence three farthings in the pound, sir,” answered Mr. Fopperton, in a low tone.

“Speak out, sir!” vociferated the learned counsel, although he heard perfectly well what had been said.

“Two-pence three farthings in the pound,” exclaimed the unfortunate Snip, who already repented most bitterly that, by coming to oppose Mr. Frank Curtis, he had fallen into the hands of Mr. Cadgerbreef.

“Two-pence three farthings in the pound,” repeated this learned gentleman, tossing up his head as if in unmitigated abhorrence at such awful villainy. “And pray, sir, what was the aggregate of liabilities under an your innumerable insolvencies and your equally numberless bankruptcies?”

“I never was bankrupt more than once, sir,” mourn-

fully and imploringly remonstrated the tailor, now worked up to a frightful pitch of nervousness and misery.

“Don’t shirk my question, sir!” exclaimed the barrister, sternly. “How much did all your liabilities—”

“Thirty thousand pounds, sir,” hastily cried Mr. Fopperton, anticipating the repetition of the query on the part of the learned gentleman.

“Be Jusus! and he’s a complete villain!” said Captain O’Blunderbuss, in such a loud tone that both the Commissioners woke up: whereupon the gallant officer affected to be seized with a sudden inclination to gaze up abstractedly at the sky-light, just for all the world as if he were quite innocent of any fresh interruption.

“Now, Mr. Fopperton,” exclaimed Mr. Cadgerbreef, seeing that the Commissioners were all attention just at this moment, and taking a skilful advantage of the circumstance, “under your numerous insolvencies and frequent bankruptcies—don’t interrupt me, sir—you have paid two-pence three farthings in the pound, on aggregate liabilities amounting to thirty thousand pounds. The Court will be pleased to notice these facts. And yet, Mr. Fopperton, we find you discounting a thousand pounds’ worth of bills for my client, the Insolvent. The Court will again please to take a note of this fact.”

Of course the Commissioners could not help making—or at least affecting to make the memoranda suggested by the learned counsel: so the sleepy one scrawled a zig-zag line across his note-book, and the other hit off a rapid sketch of Captain O’Blunderbuss’s face, Mr. Commissioner Sneesby being very proficient in that style of drawing. The two functionaries then laid down their pens, and looked as solemn and serious as if they had actually and positively taken the notes in the most business-like manner possible.

“Now, sir,” continued Mr. Cadgerbreef, once more turning to the opposing creditor, “will you tell the Court how much hard cash you gave the Insolvent for his acceptance of one thousand pounds?”

“Really, sir, the occurrence is so long ago—I—I—”

“Will you swear, man, that you gave him two hundred pounds?” demanded the learned counsel, impatiently.

“Yes, sir—I will,” was the instantaneous answer.

“Will you swear that you gave him four hundred?”—and Mr. Cadgerbreef dipped his pen into the ink with an air of awful determination.

“Why—no—I can’t exactly—” stammered the tailor, every instant becoming more and more nervous.

“Will you swear that you gave him three hundred and twenty pounds in hard cash for that bill?” demanded Mr. Cadgerbreef.

“That was just what I did pay in money,” replied Mr. Fopperton, in a hesitating manner.

“That was just what you did pay. Now tell the learned Commissioners what else you gave the Insolvent for that bill.”

“There was three hundred and twenty in cash—and four hundred and twenty in wines, pictures, and other objects of value—”

“Come—that only gives us seven hundred and forty,” cried the barrister: “how do you make up the rest?”

“A hundred pounds discount, sir—and—”

“A hundred pounds discount. Well—what next?”

“Sixty pounds commission, sir—and—”

"Sixty pounds commission. You have still another hundred to account for, Mr. Fopperton," said the learned counsel, sharply. "Come—about that other hundred? and mind what you tell the Commissioners."

"Well, sir—the hundred pounds was for *tonny*," answered the fashionable tailor.

"That will do, sir: you may stand down," said Mr. Cadgerbreef, looking significantly at the learned Commissioners, with a view of impressing it on their minds that he had just succeeded in fully unmasking a most awful rogue.

Mr. Bulliwell now rose and made a very furious speech against the Insolvent; so that a stranger unacquainted with the practice of English Courts of Justice, would have fancied that the learned counsel had some bitter and deadly motive of personal hatred against the young gentleman;—whereas all that apparent venom—that seeming spite—that assumed virulence—and that fierce eloquence were purchased by Mr. Kicksey Fopperton for a couple of guineas. The speech was cheap—yes, very cheap, when we take into consideration the almost excruciating pains that the learned gentleman took to get Frank Curtis remanded to prison for six months. So much perspiration—such frantic gesticulation—and such impassioned declamation were well worth the money; and if it did Mr. Bulliwell good to earn his two guineas on such terms, it must have been equally satisfactory to Mr. Kicksey Fopperton to obtain so good a two guineas' worth.

During the delivery of this oration, Captain O'Blunderbuss could scarcely contain his fury: as insulting epithet after epithet poured from the lips of Mr. Bulliwell, who was always more eloquent when conducting an opposition than when arguing a defence, the gallant Irishman literally foamed at the mouth;—and it was only in the hope of Mr. Cadgerbreef's ability to mend the business, that he succeeded in controlling his passion. At length Mr. Bulliwell sate down; and the captain muttered in a pretty audible tone, "Blood and thunder! he shall repent of this as long as he lives, if my frind is sent back to the Binch!"

Mr. Cadgerbreef rose to defend his client, Frank Curtis; and as the best means of making that young gentleman appear white was to represent the opposing creditor as particularly black, the learned counsel forthwith began to depict Mr. Kicksey Fopperton's character in such sable dyes that the unfortunate tailor soon found himself held up to execration as a species of moral blackamoor. In fact, the poor little man was stunned—astounded—paralysed by the vituperative eloquence of Mr. Cadgerbreef; and as the learned counsel proceeded to denounce his "numerous insolvencies" and "his frequent bankruptcies" as proofs of unmitigated depravity,—as he dwelt upon the features of the bill-transaction, and spoke with loathing of the *discount*, with disgust of the *commission*, and with perfect horror of the *bonus*,—Mr. Fopperton began to say to himself, "Well, upon my word, I begin to fear that I am indeed a most unprincipled scoundrel: but the fact was never brought home to me so forcibly before!"

In the meantime Captain O'Blunderbuss was in perfect ecstasies: he forgot all that Mr. Bulliwell had said, in listening to the counter-declaration of Mr. Cadgerbreef;—and his delight was expressed in frequent ejaculatory outbursts, such as "Be Jasus, and there ye have him!" but which passed comparatively unnoticed amidst the thundering din of the learned counsel's torrent of words. As for Mr. Frank Curtis, he had

care-d little for the violent assault made upon him by Mr. Bulliwell; but he was immensely pleased at the laugh-terous attack effected by Mr. Cadgerbreef on the dis-ayed an ill-clothed tailor.

The defence being concluded, the two learned Commissioners consulted with each other in whispers; and when they had exchanged a few remarks having no more reference to the case before them than to the affairs of the Chinese Empire, Mr. Commissioner Sneesby proceeded to deliver the judgment of the Court.

Looking as awfully solemn as possible, he said, "Insolvent, it is perfectly clear that you have run a career of extravagance and folly which must be summarily checked. While enjoying a handsome allowance from your worthy uncle, you contracted numerous debts in a most reckless manner; and it is probable that Sir Christopher Blunt withdrew that allowance in consequence of your spendthrift habits. Insolvent, the Court is of opinion that you cannot be allowed your freedom again until you shall have passed a certain time in confinement, both as a punishment for the past and as a warning for the future. The judgment of the Court is, therefore, that you be remanded at the suit of your opposing creditor, Mr. Fopperton, for the space of five calendar months from the date of your vesting order."

"Thin bad luck to ye, ye slapy-headed ould scoundrels!" vociferated Captain O'Blunderbuss.

"Holloa, there!" cried the usher, unable to pass over such a flagrant breach of decorum as this, in spite of the awe with which the terrible Irishman inspired him; and, springing towards the captain, the official clutched him by the collar—while, to use the words of the newspaper reporter, "the most tremendous sensation pervaded the Court."

But Gorman O'Blunderbuss was not the man to be thus assailed with impunity; and, knocking down the usher with one hand and Mr. Kicksey Fopperton on the top of him with the other, he made a desperate rush from the tribunal, no opposition being offered to his exit.

A few minutes afterwards he was joined at the public-house over the way by his friend Frank Curtis and the tipstaff who had charge of the latter; and the three worthies, following the example of the pious Mr. Joshua Sheepshanks, drank spirits-and-water until they were compelled to return to the King's Bench in a hackney-coach.

CHAPTER CXX.

THE LAPSE OF NINETEEN YEARS.

How easy is it to record upon paper the sweeping words—"Nineteen years had passed away since the occurrences just related:"—how easy is it with a few moments' manipulation of the pen to leap over a period embracing almost the fifth part of a century!

Nineteen years!—a few short syllables—a drop of ink—a scrap of paper—and a minute's trouble,—these are all that the novelist needs to enable him to pass by the deeds of nineteen years!

Oh! this very power compels us to look with suspicion upon the utility of our own avocations,—to reflect how far removed from *the* natural is even the *most* natural of the works of fiction,—and to feel the nothingness of all the efforts of the imagination when

placed in contrast with the stern and stubborn facts of the real world!

For though the novelist, exercising a despotic power over the offspring of his fancy, may dispose of years—aye, even of centuries, with a dash of his pen,—yet of Time, as the universe actually experiences its march, not one instant can he stay—not one instant accelerate.

Great Kings, who have proclaimed themselves demigods and compelled the millions to abase themselves round their mighty thrones,—at whose awful nod whole nations have trembled as if at the frown of Olympian Jove, and whose impatient stamp on the marble pavement of their palaces has seemed to shake the earth to its very centre,—proud and haughty monarchs such as these have been powerless in the hands of Time as infants in the grasp of a Giant. Though heads would fall at their command, yet not a hair of their own could they prevent from turning gray: though at their beck whole provinces were depopulated, yet not a single moment could they add to their own lives!

Time is a sovereign more potent than all the imperial rulers that ever wore the Tyrian purple,—stronger than the bravest warriors that ever led conquering armies over desolated lands,—less easy to be moved to mercy than the fiercest tyrants that ever grasped earthly sceptres.

To those who, being in misery, look forward to the certain happiness that already gleams upon them with orient flickerings from the distance, Time is slow—oh! so slow, that his feet seem heavy with iron weights and his wings with lead:—but to those who, being as yet happy, behold unmistakable auguries of approaching affliction, Time is rapid—oh! so rapid, that his feet appear to glide glancingly along like those of a sportive boy in pursuit of a butterfly, and his wings are as light and buoyant as the fleetest of birds.

The wicked man, stretched upon the bed of death, cries out, "Oh! for leisure to repent!"—but Time disregards his agonising prayer, and saith, "Die!" The invalid, racked with excruciating pains and wearied of an existence which knows no relief from suffering, exclaims, "Oh! that death would snatch me away!"—but Time accordeth not the shrieking aspiration, and saith, "Live on!"

Passionless and without feeling though he be, Time shows caprices in which the giddiest and most wilful girl would be ashamed to indulge,—sparing where he ought to slay—slaying where he ought to spare: insensible to all motives, incompetent to form designs, he appears to act with a method of contradictions and on a system of studied irregularities.

"Nineteen years had passed away since the occurrences related in the preceding chapters!"—Such is the sweeping assertion which we have now to make.

Nineteen years!—how much joy had been experienced, how much misery felt, during that interval: what vast changes had taken place over the whole earth!

In these islands that period was marked with the names of three sovereigns:—George the Fourth—William the Fourth—Victoria.

The debaucheries, vices, and profligacies of George lessened the value of Monarchy even in the eyes of its staunchest supporters: the utter incompetency, weakness, and even downright silliness of William reduced it to a still greater discount;—and the accession of

Victoria proclaimed the grand fact that Monarchy is a farce, since a mere school-girl can be put up as the throned puppet of the Punch-and-Judy show of Royalty.

During nineteen years, then, did the value of Monarchy experience a rapid and signal decline: and, though it still endures, it is hastening with whirlwind speed to total annihilation. Men are becoming too wise to maintain a throne which may either be filled by a voluptuary, a fool, or a doll: they see something radically and flagrantly bad in an institution which is fraught with such frightful contingencies;—and they look forward to a convenient moment and a proper opportunity to effect, by moral means, and without violence, a complete change. The throne is worm-eaten—its velvet is in holes and covered with dust, and no earthly power can repair the wood nor patch up the cloth. It is old—rickety—and good-for-nothing; and the magisterial seat of a President, elected by the nation at large, must displace it. Monarchy falling, will drag down the ancient Aristocracy along with it; and the twenty-six millions of these realms all starting fair together on a principle of universal equality, those who succeed in reaching the goals of VIRTUE and TALENT will constitute and form a new Aristocracy.

Nineteen years had passed away since the occurrences related in the preceding chapters; and it was now the summer of 1846.

The July sun gave forth a heat of intense sultriness; and not a breath of air fanned the stifling streets of the West-End, nor agitated the green foliage of St. James's Park. Nevertheless all that fashionable quarter of London which lies within the immediate vicinity of the old palace that gives its name to the park just mentioned, presented a bustling and animated appearance; for Queen Victoria was to hold a grand reception at noon that day.

Pall Mall was thronged with well-dressed persons of both sexes;—and the windows and balconies in that thoroughfare were crowded with elegantly-attired ladies and gentlemen, who were either the occupants of the houses at the casements of which they were thus stationed, or had hired seats at the shops where the cupidity of the proprietors turned to advantage the curiosity of the public.

It was evident, then, that the reception to be holden this day was of no ordinary character, and that some great or illustrious personage was expected to attend the royal levee. For, amongst the thousands that thronged the streets, an immense anxiety to secure the best places prevailed; and in all quarters was the eager question asked—"But is it certain that the Prince will come this way?"

We must pause for a few minutes to notice a group occupying the balcony of the drawing-room windows at the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham. This group consisted of six persons—three gentlemen, and three ladies.

The first of the three gentlemen was a fine, handsome, noble-looking man of about forty-five years of age—with a countenance indicating feelings of the most lofty honour, great generosity, and a splendid intellect. This was the Earl of Ellingham.

Near him stood an old and venerable gentleman, whose years were verging fast to three-score-and-ten, but whose small, restless, sparkling eyes beamed with the fires of genius, and whose compressed lips showed

that although he had consented to become a spectator of the gay scene about to take place, his thoughts frequently wandered to subjects of a more serious kind and more congenial to his nature. This was Sir John Lascelles—the most eminent physician of the age, and who had received the honour of knighthood in recompense for the great services which he had rendered to the art of medicine.

The third gentleman was about twenty-five years of age. Tall, handsome, well-formed, and genteel in appearance, he seemed a fit and suitable companion for the lovely girl who leant upon his arm, and of whom we shall speak more fully anon. The fine young man at present alluded to, was called by the name of Charles Hatfield; but in the former portion of this work he was known, when a little boy, to the reader as Charley Watts.

The first of the three ladies was about thirty-seven years of age; and her beauty, in the finest, chastest, and most elevated Hebrew style, was admirably preserved. The lapse of years had only matured her charms, and not impaired them: time had touched not the pearly whiteness of her teeth, nor dimmed the brilliant lustre of her large dark eyes. Her hair was still of the deepest and glossiest jet,—silken and luxuriant, as when we first described it in the fourth chapter of our narrative:—for she of whom we are speaking now, was Esther, Countess of Ellingham.

Conversing with the noble Jewess—for she clung to the faith of her forefathers—was a lady whose style of beauty was of that magnificent and voluptuous kind which sets the beholder at naught in his calculations and conjectures relative to the age of the object of his admiration;—for though forty-four years had passed over the head of Lady Hatfield, she was still endowed with a loveliness that, though matured, seemed to have known only the lapse of summers and never to have passed through the snowy storms of as many winters.

And now we must speak more in detail of that charming girl to whom we alluded ere now, and who was leaning on the arm of Lady Hatfield's son. Ravishingly beautiful was this young creature of seventeen—with the aquiline countenance of her mother, and the Saxon complexion of her father. Yes—lovely indeed was Lady Frances Ellingham, the only issue of the alliance which took place between the Earl and Esther one year after the murder of Tamar, and consequently eighteen years previous to the period of which we are now writing. Much of the description which we gave of Esther in the opening of our tale, would apply to the charms of her daughter, whose forehead was high, broad, and intelligent,—whose mouth was small, and revealing in smiles teeth white as orient pearls,—whose eyes were large and dark,—and whose figure was tall, sylph-like, and graceful. But Lady Frances Ellingham's hair, though dark, was several shades less jetty than that of her mother; and her complexion was delicately clear, with a slight tinge of rich carnation appearing beneath the dazzling purity of the skin.

Such was the interesting group of six persons stationed in the balcony of the Earl of Ellingham's mansion. But while they are awaiting the presence of the illustrious individual who is expected to pass through Pall Mall to the Queen's levee at St. James's palace, we will place on record a few short facts that will render less obscure to our readers the interval of nineteen years over which we have thought fit to leap in our narrative.

For a long—long time after the murder of Tamar, Tom Rain appeared inaccessible to consolation: but at last his naturally strong mind and vigorous intellect began to exercise their energies—the former to combat against the deep and depressing sense of affliction—and the latter to teach him the necessity of putting forth all his powers in the struggle, not only on account of the inutility of repinings, but likewise for the sake of those who were interested in him. It was, however, chiefly on the occasion of Lord Ellingham's marriage with Esther de Medina, that Rainford perceptibly rallied; for it did his generous heart good to behold the happiness of his half-brother. As time wore on, Tom Rain recovered much of his former cheerfulness; and after the lapse of three years from the date of Tamar's death, he began to listen with attention, if not with interest, to the representations made to him by the Earl, urging him to the performance of a duty which it was now in his power to fulfil. Arthur reminded him of Georgiana Hatfield's generous conduct in obtaining the royal pardon,—he assured Rainford that her ladyship no longer thought of him with abhorrence and aversion, but would cheerfully bestow her hand on the father of her child,—and the nobleman moreover advised the alliance on the ground that the boy would then dwell with both his parents. The death of Mr. de Medina, which happened about that time, delayed the negotiations thus commenced; but at the expiration of a year the proposal was revived, and the necessary arrangements were speedily adjusted. In fine, it was settled that Rainford should abandon the name by which he had hitherto been known, and assume that of Hatfield,—that the boy should be thenceforth called in the same manner, but should be brought up in the belief that he was Rainford's nephew,—and that after the marriage, which was to be solemnized in the most private manner possible, the wedded pair should proceed to the continent, and there reside for some years. All these arrangements were duly carried out. Rainford—whom we shall henceforth call by his wife's name—became the husband of Lady Georgiana Hatfield;—and, taking with them their child, who was represented to be their nephew, they forthwith repaired to Italy, where they dwelt for nearly fifteen years. Thus, on their return to London, only a few weeks before the date up to which we have now brought the incidents of our tale, all the stirring circumstances once associated with the name of Tom Rain were pretty well forgotten; and none, save those few who were in the secret, suspected that the pleasant, gentlemanly, good-natured Mr. Hatfield was identical with the individual who nineteen years previously had filled all England with his fame.

While we have been thus digressing, the sensation amongst the crowds in Pall Mall has increased;—for the carriages of several eminent or illustrious personages have passed along in their way to the royal levee.

In the balcony at the Earl of Ellingham's drawing-room window, a degree of curiosity and excitement prevailed which certainly could not have been aroused on the part of the intelligent individuals there assembled, by the mere display of gorgeous equipages. Let us see whether the conversation passing in that balcony will throw any light upon the subject.

"Well," exclaimed Sir John Lascelles, almost in a petulant tone, "I wonder how much longer your cynosure of attraction will be before he makes his appearance? Truly, it was worth while for my friend

Ellingham here, to drag me away from my experiments in order to catch a glimpse of a foreign Prince—"

"Nay, doctor," interrupted the Earl, smiling: "it was precisely because this illustrious Prince is not a foreigner—but an Englishman by birth and a true Briton in his noble heart—that I thought you would be pleased to join those who are desirous to behold a youthful hero whose name occupies so memorable a page in history."

"Well, well," said the physician, somewhat more mildly: "I will have patience—and since you assure us that the object of all curiosity is indeed an Englishman—"

"Surely you can neither doubt the fact, nor be ignorant of his great achievements, doctor?" exclaimed the Earl. "But if you wish to receive positive assurances as to his Royal Highness's English parentage, Lady Hatfield will satisfy you."

"Yes—truly," observed Georgiana. "When we were staying in Italy, we not only became as it were eye-witnesses of the great Revolution which was conducted to so signally triumphant an issue by the young hero of whom you are speaking; but we subsequently had the honour of forming the acquaintance of his Royal Highness and that of his Princess, who is as amiable as she is beautiful."

"And now that the Prince has come to visit his native land once more," said Charles Hatfield, his eyes flashing the fires of that enthusiasm which filled his soul, "the people assemble in crowds to do honour to their illustrious fellow-countryman. Oh! how delicious must his feelings be, when he reflects that as an obscure individual he once moved, unnoticed and unknown, amidst the mazes of this great city,—and that by his own brilliant merits he has raised himself to that pinnacle of rank and glory which renders him the admiration of the myriads now assembled to welcome his presence."

"Well spoken, my dear Charles," exclaimed Lady Hatfield. "Look up and down the street—it is literally paved and walled with human faces! In the balconies on either side of this house—and opposite too—I recognise many ladies and peers of the highest rank. Yes—Charles, you are right: the feelings of the Prince must indeed be joyous when he reflects that this vast congregation of all classes has gathered to do honour to the fellow-countryman of whom they are so justly proud."

"History teems with examples of bold, bad, and ambitious men usurping power and decorating themselves with lofty titles," continued Charles, addressing himself partly to Lady Hatfield and partly to the beautiful Lady Frances Ellingham: "but in the present instance we have a young Englishman, of generous soul, enlightened opinions, and even rigorous rectitude of conduct, raising himself from nothing as it were and acquiring the proudest titular distinctions. For what a glorious elevation was it from plain *Mr. Richard Markham* to *His Royal Highness Field-Marshal the Prince of Montoni, Captain-General of the Castalcical Army, and Heir-Apparent to the Grand-Ducal Throne!*"

Scarcely had Charles Hatfield enunciated these sounding titles in a tone which afforded full evidence of the enthusiasm that filled his soul as he thought of the splendid career of Richard Markham,* when far-off shouts of welcome and of joy suddenly reached the ears of the group on the balcony:—then those

sounds came nearer and nearer, as the crowd took up the cries from the direction where they commenced;—and never was Royalty saluted with a more cordial greeting than that which now welcomed the hero of Castalcicala.

"Long live the Prince of Montoni! God save Richard Markham!" were the words sent up by thousands and thousands of voices to the blue arch of heaven.

In a short time a handsome carriage, drawn by four magnificent horses, came in sight of the spectators in the balcony; and nothing could now exceed the enthusiasm of Charles Hatfield, as he once more beheld the object of his heroic idolatry—that fine young Prince whom he had so often admired and envied when in the vast square of the ducal palace of Montoni his Royal Highness reviewed the garrison of the Castalcicalan capital.

The Prince, who was accompanied in his carriage by two aides-de-camp, wore the uniform of his high military rank; his breast was covered with Orders; and in his hand he carried his plumed hat, which he had removed from his brow through respect to the generous British public from whom he now received so enthusiastic a welcome.

His Royal Highness was in the prime and glory of his manhood. He was thirty years of age: his dark hair, which he wore rather long and which curled naturally, enclosed a forehead that appeared to be the seat of genius of the highest order;—and his fine black eyes were bright with the fire of intelligence and the animation of complete happiness. His magnificent uniform set off his symmetrical and graceful figure to its fullest advantage; and he acknowledged with affability and modest condescension the demonstrations of joy and welcome which marked his progress.

As his equipage passed opposite the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham, his eyes were attracted to the balcony; and, recognising Lady Hatfield and the enthusiastic Charles, he bowed to them in a manner which testified the pleasure he experienced at again beholding those whose acquaintance he had formed in the ducal capital of Castalcicala.

"He is certainly a very fine young man," said Sir John Lascelles. "I have seldom seen a countenance so expressive of vast mental resources:" then, after a short pause, the worthy physician added, "I would give much for a cast of his head."

The Earl was about to make some reply, when his own name was suddenly shouted forth by a voice in the street; and that name, taken up by tongue after tongue, was echoed by thousands of individuals who were delighted to associate the stanch friend of the industrious classes of England with their enthusiastic welcomings of the royal champion of constitutional freedom in Italy.

"Long live the Marshal-Prince of Montoni! three cheers for the Earl of Ellingham!" were now the cries that made the very welkin ring; and these shouts were prolonged for some time, until the carriage of his Royal Highness turned into the court-yard of St. James's palace, and the Earl on his side withdrew from the balcony.

"You sigh, Charles?" said Lady Frances Ellingham, in a low and somewhat anxious tone, and speaking apart to him whom she believed to be Lady Hatfield's nephew.

"I was only thinking, dear Fanny," answered the young gentleman, "that much and earnestly as I may strive to elevate myself, it will never be my good for—"

* See the First Series of "THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON"

time to have such opportunities as the Prince of Montoni found for distinguishing his name and acquiring an immense reputation."

"Are you envious of him, Charles?" enquired the beautiful maiden, in a somewhat reproachful tone. "I thought that you recked not for titles and high rank—"

"No—not when they are hereditary," hastily replied Charles Hatfield: "and this assurance I have often given you in secret—because I should not like to make such an observation before your noble father, whose title is hereditary. But I admire—yes, and I envy too, the honours which a great man acquires by his own merits! Do you imagine that the English people would have assembled in vast crowds to hail and welcome one of their own royal Dukes? No, indeed! And yet they seem as if they could not testify their joy in too lively a manner, when the Prince of Montoni appears amongst them."

While this little dialogue was taking place in one part of the spacious drawing-room at the Earl of Ellingham's mansion, the nobleman himself was conversing with his wife and Lady Hatfield in another—the entire group having withdrawn from the balcony, and Sir John Lascelles having quitted the apartment.

"Yes," said the Earl, in answer to a question put to him by Lady Hatfield; "I have understood that the Prince proposes to stay some weeks in London. The Princess Isabella has not accompanied him—her royal parents, the Grand Duke Alberto and the Grand Duchess, being loth to part with her. The Prince has taken up his abode—at least, so states the morning newspaper—at Markham Place, the house where he was born and where all his youth and a portion of his manhood were passed. Accordingly, as you desire, Georgiana, I will call upon his Royal Highness to-morrow; and I will request him to accept of an entertainment at this mansion."

"How did it occur," enquired the Countess of Ellingham, "that Thomas was not with us just now to behold the progress of the Prince to St. James's?"

"You know, dear Esther," answered Lady Hatfield, "that my husband loves privacy and seclusion, and especially avoids appearing in crowded places. He fears to be recognised," she added, sinking her voice so as to be inaudible to Charles and Lady Frances, who were at the opposite end of the apartment: "and he is perhaps right—although so many years have elapsed since those occurrences—"

"To which we will not refer," interrupted Lord Ellingham, hastily. "How very seriously the young people appear to be conversing together," he added, glancing towards Charles Hatfield and Lady Frances.

"Charles has imbibed certain romantic ideas and hopes of distinguishing himself in the world," observed Georgiana; "and I think it right to encourage such noble—such generous aspirations. But your charming daughter is evidently remonstrating with him upon some point; and yet the two cousins appear to be much attached to each other," she added, with rather an anxious look at the Earl, as if she were uncertain how he might receive the observation, into which she threw a degree of significance.

"You have mentioned a circumstance which gives me much pleasure—nay, not only myself, but likewise my dearest Esther," said the nobleman. "We have already adopted it as the basis of many happy plans for the future—"

"Yes," observed the Countess of Ellingham, emphatically: "an alliance between Charles and our be-

loved daughter, would prove a source of felicity and satisfaction to us all."

"Arthur—and you, too, dear Esther," murmured Lady Hatfield, in a tone indicative of deep emotions, "I thank you for these assurances. All my earthly ambition—my sole hope, would be accomplished on the day that such an union took place. Alas! poor boy—it is distressing—Oh! it is distressing to be compelled to veil from him the real secret of his parentage—to hear him at times question me relative to his parents—his *supposed* parents, who are represented to be no more! Yes—and it is cruel, too, to be forced to deceive him—to hear him call me his *aunt*—I, who am his *mother*!"

"Georgiana—dearest Georgiana, do not thus afflict yourself!" murmured Esther, pressing Lady Hatfield's hand in a tender manner, and speaking in a tone of consolation and sweet sympathy.

But almost at the same instant a piercing scream burst from Georgiana's lips; and she fell senseless into the arms of the Countess of Ellingham—while the Earl, turning mechanically and hastily round, beheld Charles standing close behind him,—pale—astounded—petrified! For the young man had advanced unperceived—and his tread unheard on the thick, soft carpet—towards the group formed by Lady Hatfield, the nobleman, and the Countess: and his ears had caught these words—"to hear him call me *aunt*—I, who am his *mother*!"

For a few instants he stood motionless—amazed and stupefied by what he had heard;—but, suddenly recovering the power of movement and yielding to the ineffable sensations which were excited in his breast, he sprang forward—and catching his still insensible parent in his arms, he cried, "Oh! my dearest mother—my beloved, my adored mother—open your eyes—look upon me—"

"His mother!" exclaimed Lady Frances, overwhelmed with surprise, and unable, in the innocence of her virgin heart, to form even the slightest notion that might serve as a clue to what was still so deep a mystery to her.

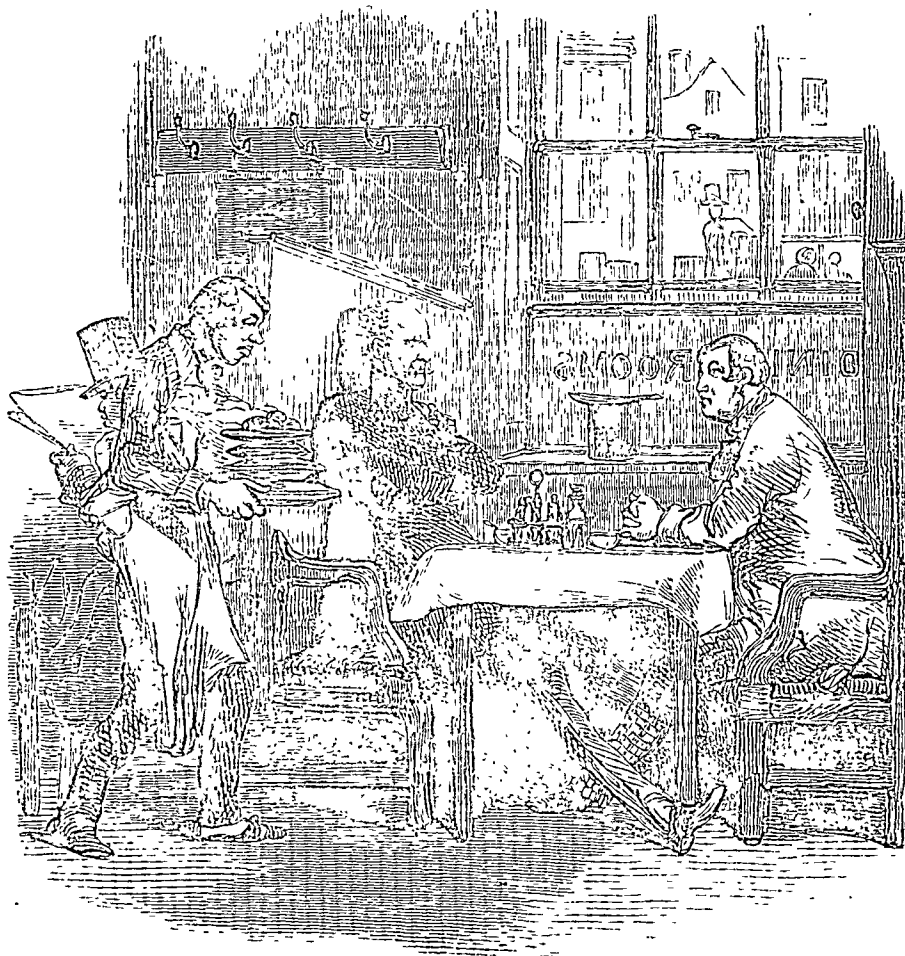
"Yes—my dearest Fanny," said the Earl, hastily drawing his daughter aside and speaking to her in a low and rapid tone: "Charles is indeed the *son*—and not the *nephew*—of Mr. Hatfield and Lady Georgiana. But reasons of an imperious necessity—reasons which you are too young to comprehend, and too discreet to enquire into—"

"My dear father, I seek to know no more than it may please you to tell me," interrupted the young lady, with a decision as amiable as it was dutiful and re-assuring: "and my behaviour shall henceforth be as if I had not been accidentally made the spectatress of this scene."

"You are my own beloved—darling daughter!" exclaimed the Earl enthusiastically, as he pressed his lips to the pure and chaste forehead of the charming countenance that was upturned so lovingly towards his own.

By this time Lady Hatfield had been recovered through the kind attentions of Esther; and, awaking to consciousness, she clasped her son to her bosom, murmuring in a faint tone and broken voice, "Now you have learnt my secret, Charles—a secret which—But another time—another time, you shall know all! Oh! Charles—I feel so much happiness and so much sorrow—strangely blended—at this moment—"

"Compose yourself, dearest—dearest parent!" exclaimed the young man, his tears flowing freely "I



now know that you are my mother—and I care to know nothing more! Never—never shall I question you concerning the past: the enjoyment of the present, and the hope which gilds the future—these are enough for me!”

“My poor boy!” murmured Lady Hatfield, straining him to her breast: “I feel as if an immense weight were taken from my mind—I seem to drink of a purer source of happiness than I have ever yet known—Oh! why did I ever hesitate to tell thee that thou wast my son!”

And again she pressed him closer and closer still to her bosom, covering his brow and cheeks with kisses; while tears flowed from the eyes of the Countess and of Lady Frances at the touching spectacle—and the Earl turned aside to conceal his emotions.

CHAPTER CXVI.

MR. HATFIELD.

In the meantime Sir John Lascelles had repaired to the library in the Earl of Ellingham’s mansion; and

there he found, as he had anticipated, his friend Mr. Hatfield—late Tom Rain.

This individual was now in his fiftieth year; and he was much changed by time as well as by art. He still possessed the fine teeth which caused the beholder to forget the somewhat coarse thickness of the lips;—but the laugh that came from those lips, when he was in a happy mood, was more subdued and quiet than when the reader first made his acquaintance many years previously to the present date. Though never inclined to corpulency, he had nevertheless become thinner: yet his form was still upright, muscular, and well-knit. In his calm moments, especially when he was alone, a slight shade of melancholy appeared upon his countenance;—and he even sighed at times as he thought upon the past.

These were the changes which the lapse of years had effected in regard to him; and the appliances of art rendered it still more difficult to recognise in the Mr. Hatfield of 1846 the rollicking Tom Rain of 1827. For his hair and whiskers were dyed a very dark hue; and his attire was a plain suit of black.

Was he happy? Yes—to a certain extent, in spite of the shade of melancholy and the occasional sighs. His was a disposition originally so gay and joyous

that it could not be completely subdued—only mellowed down. Years of rigorous integrity—boundless charity—never-failing philanthropy—and innumerable good deeds, had established in his mind a confidence that the errors of his early life were fully expiated;—and so complacently could he look upon the present, that he no longer reproached himself for the past.

This was the usual tenour of his mind: but, as we have already hinted, there were now and then moody intervals in which thought became painful. These were, however, of no frequent occurrence;—and, thus—on the whole—we may assert that Mr. Hatfield was happy.

The conduct of Lady Georgiana towards him, from the moment of their union, had been of an affectionate and touching nature. She studied to enact the part of the tender wife—the sincere friend—and the amiable woman: and she succeeded fully. Espousing him at first solely on account of their child, she soon began to like her husband—next to admire him—eventually to love him. She found him to be possessed of numerous good qualities—noble and generous feelings—and sentiments far more refined than she could possibly have anticipated. The terms on which he lived with her, therefore, aided in insuring his happiness; and the fine principles as well as handsome appearance of their son, were a source of profound delight to them both.

Mr. de Medina had died possessed of great wealth—one half of which was bequeathed to Mr. Hatfield. This amount, joined to Lady Hatfield's fortune, rendered them very wealthy; and their riches were almost doubled by the demise of Sir Ralph Walsingham, Georgiana's uncle, who left them all his fine estates. Thus their income might be calculated at thirty thousand a-year; and no inconsiderable portion of this splendid revenue was devoted to humane and charitable purposes.

When Sir John Lascelles entered the library, as above stated, Mr. Hatfield hastened to welcome him with all the affectionate assiduity of a son receiving a visit from a kind and venerable parent: and the worthy physician evidently experienced a greater elasticity of feeling towards Mr. Hatfield than to any other friend whom he possessed on earth. The one never could forget that he owed his life to the science of the doctor: the other looked on Hatfield as a person whom he had actually restored to the world, and as a living proof of the triumph which had crowned long years of research in respect to a particular study.

"My dear friend," said Sir John Lascelles, when they were both seated, "I have just witnessed a spectacle that I must candidly admit to have been very gratifying. The English are a most generous-hearted people, and are quick also in the appreciation of sterling merit. The Earl's name was just now coupled with the shouts of applause that welcomed the Prince of Montoni."

"I am rejoiced to hear these tidings," observed Mr. Hatfield. "Indeed, it struck me, as the sounds of the myriad voices reached my ears in the seclusion of this room, remote though it be from the apartment whence you have just come,—it struck me, I say, that I heard my brother's name mentioned. For nineteen years has Arthur now struggled in the interests of the middle and industrious classes: session after session has he passed in review the miseries and the wrongs endured by the sons and daughters of toil;—and what has he experienced from the several Administrations which have succeeded each other during that period? Though

Whigs and Tories have held the reins of power in their turns, the treatment received by my brother has been uniformly the same. The most strenuous opposition to all his grand proposals has been offered; and when some trifling point has been conceded, 'twas as if a boon were conferred instead of an act of justice done. But although Arthur has thus failed in inducing the Government to adopt large and comprehensive measures for the relief, benefit, and elevation of the industrious classes, he has at least succeeded in giving such an impetus to Liberal sentiments out of doors—beyond the walls of the Senate-house—that he has taught millions to think, who never thought before, upon their political condition. Though baffled in the Legislative Assembly—though thwarted by the old school of aristocracy, and the supporters of those vile abuses which are summed up in the phrase '*the landed interest*'—though opposed with unmitigated hostility by the worshippers of '*the wisdom of our ancestors*,'—nevertheless, Arthur has returned undaunted to the charge. Never disheartened—never cast down—always courageous in the People's Cause, he has fearlessly exposed the rottenness of our antiquated institutions, and mercilessly torn away the veil from our worn-out systems. The millions recognise and appreciate his conscientious—his unwearied strivings in their behalf; and they adore him as their champion. Unassuming—honest—and free from all selfishness as he is, it must nevertheless have been a proud moment for my brother when he heard his name associated ere now with that of the illustrious Prince who achieved the liberation of Castelcicala beneath the walls of Montoni."

"The gratitude of the industrious classes is the most welcome reward that a well-intentioned and a true patriot can possibly experience," observed Sir John Lascelles. "The Earl certainly seemed pleased with the high but merited compliment thus paid to him—although not for one minute did he seek it, when he appeared at the balcony; for I noticed that he rather endeavoured to conceal himself behind the window-curtain. But speaking of the Prince—he is a very handsome young man."

"The Castelcicalans absolutely worship him," said Mr. Hatfield; "and they look upon him as in every way fitted to succeed the Grand Duke Alberto, whenever death shall snatch away that great and enlightened sovereign from the throne."

"It was in the Castelcicalan capital that poor Jacob Smith breathed his last—was it not?" enquired the physician.

"Yes—in the suburbs of Montoni," answered Mr. Hatfield. "As you are well aware, the poor youth never recovered the shock which he sustained on learning that he owed his being to that dreadful man—Benjamin Bones; and the horrible way in which that remorseless wretch died, augmented the weight of the fearful blow caused by that discovery. Jacob scarcely ever rallied—scarcely ever held up his head afterwards: the only gleam of happiness which he knew was afforded by the good tidings that we received relative to the Bunces—and even that was insufficient to sustain his drooping spirit. He languished away—for six years he pined in sorrow, accessible to no consolation that travelling, change of scenery, or our attentions could impart. It was several years before the Great Revolution, which, conducted by Richard Markham, gave freedom to Castelcicala and raised up that hero to a princely rank,—it was some years before this glorious era, that Jacob Smith—for he always

retained that name—breathed his last. We buried him in a picturesque cemetery on the banks of the river Ferretti; and a cross—according to the custom of that Catholic country—was placed to mark his last home."

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed the doctor. "He was always sickly—and the discovery of his hideous parentage was too much for so weak a constitution. And now let us turn to another subject:—have you received the letters which you expected concerning the various individuals——"

"I know to whom you allude," interrupted Mr. Hatfield; "and I have now before me," he added, glancing at several letters, "the correspondence relating to those persons. Timothy Splint still remains the occupant of a fine farm in the backwoods of the United States; and the last nineteen years of his existence have proved the sincere penitence which he feels for the crimes of his earlier days. He possesses a competency—if not positive wealth. By his marriage with the daughter of a neighbouring settler, he has a numerous family; and he brings up his children in the ways of morality and virtue. Indeed, I am well aware that he has lived to bless the period when he went through the ordeal of the subterranean dungeon."

"You prophesied that he would!" exclaimed Sir John Lascelles. "Yes—those were the very words which you used when speaking of him to me nineteen years ago. I recollect them perfectly;—for age has not impaired my memory, thank heaven!"

"I now come to Joshua Pedler," resumed Mr. Hatfield. "You will remember, my dear doctor, that this man and his wife Matilda were appointed to the charge of the Eddystone Light-house. There they remained for six or seven years—as indeed I wrote to you to this effect a long time ago——"

"Yes—and then you sent them out as emigrants to Canada," interrupted Sir John Lascelles; "and they continued to do well. What say your last accounts concerning them?"

"They are still happy—contented—and prosperous," answered Mr. Hatfield. "Their shop at Quebec thrives admirably; and they have managed to put by several hundred pounds. Pedler says that the sweetest bread he has ever eaten in his life, has been that which he has earned by his honest toils. I have reason to feel convinced, moreover, that he is kind and good towards his wife, and that his only regret is their not having any children."

"And the Bunces are still living in St. Peter's-Port, after having acquired a competency in the Island of Sark?" enquired the physician.

"Yes—they are still in the capital of Guernsey," was the response. "Bunce tells me in his letter that his wife's health does not improve; in fact, she doubtless received a cruel shock when she heard of the death of Jacob Smith—for it had been her hope that he might some day take up his abode with her and her husband—a hope which she however nourished in secret."

"Bunce himself has never learnt the real parentage of Jacob, I believe?" said the physician. "Indeed, I remember you told me the other day that his wife, always bearing in mind the injunctions you conveyed to her through Mrs. Harding, had retained as a profound secret her former illicit connexion with Benjamin Bones."

"Yes—it was useless to make a revelation which would only have troubled their domestic peace," said

Mr. Hatfield. "Harding divined the hope that the woman had formed relative to Jacob—and in his letters he communicated his ideas to me. But even if death had spared Jacob, he would not have quitted me—no, not though it were to dwell with his own mother!"

"And Jeffreys?" asked the physician: "what of him?"

"He is well pleased that he removed last summer from Hackney to Liverpool. The money he had saved during a period of eighteen years at his shop in the London suburb, enabled him to take a very handsome establishment in the great commercial town in the north; and he is carrying on a large and flourishing business."

"Thus, in every instance, save that of Old Death, have you succeeded in reclaiming those wicked people whose reform you took in hand," said Sir John Lascelles. "Tidmarsh died tranquilly in his bed in the Island of Alderney—and the others still exist, worthy members of society."

With these words the physician rose and took his leave; and almost immediately after he had quitted the library, the Earl of Ellingham entered, closing the door behind him with the caution of one who has some important or mysterious communication to make.

"Arthur, you have evil tidings for me?" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, advancing towards his noble half-brother.

"Nay—they can scarcely be called evil, Thomas," was the reply: "and yet—'t would perhaps have been better——"

"Speak! Keep me not in suspense," interrupted the other.

"Charles—your son——"

"Ah! he has discovered his parentage!" cried Hatfield. "Yes—I am sure that this is the circumstance which you came to communicate;"—and he walked twice up and down the room in an agitated manner: then, suddenly turning towards his brother, he said, "How did this occur, Arthur?"

The Earl related the incident just as it had taken place, not forgetting the short but impressive dialogue which he had with his own daughter, Lady Frances, respecting the sudden and accidental revelation of the secret of Charles Hatfield's birth.

"After all, I am not sorry that this has so happened," observed the nobleman's half-brother. "Sooner or later the truth must have been confided to my son—my dear son;—and since the secret may still be preserved in respect to the world and to those whom we would not wish to become acquainted with it——"

"Sir John Lascelles himself does not even suspect it," interrupted Arthur. "It is known but to our immediate family—and Georgiana's honour is as safe as ever it was. The breath of scandal cannot reach it."

"Thanks, my dear brother—a thousand thanks for this assurance!" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield. "And now let my son come hither to embrace me as his father:—but, Arthur," he added, sinking his voice to a low and solemn tone, "let him not enquire into the motives which induced his parents to envelop his birth in mystery. Enjoin him to forbear from any attempt to gratify his curiosity in that respect!"

"I hope—indeed, I believe that you have no painful ordeal of such a nature to apprehend," replied the Earl of Ellingham; and having thus spoken, he quitted the library.

Two minutes elapsed, during which Mr. Hatfield once more paced the apartment in an agitated manner.

for, knowing the fine spirit of his son, he trembled lest it should be checked or even broken by the mortifying suspicion that he was illegitimate!

"A falsehood is abhorrent to me," he thought within himself: "and yet—if he should question me respecting his birth—I dare not avow the truth! I must not confess to my own son that his being resulted from an atrocious outrage perpetrated by myself:—nor must I permit him to suspect the honour of his mother! Silence on my part, I now perceive, would engender such suspicion in respect to her; and she must not lose one particle of the dignity of virtue in the eyes of her own offspring! Alas! painful position!—and, Oh! with what foolish and short-sighted haste did I ere now affirm that I was not sorry for the discovery which he had made!"

At this moment the door opened, and Charles sprang forward into his father's arms, which were extended to receive him.

For some minutes they remained silent—each too profoundly the prey to ineffable emotions to give utterance to a syllable.

"I am proud—I am rejoiced to be able to call you by the sacred name of *Father!*" at length exclaimed Charles, speaking with the abrupt loosening of the tongue which was caused by a sudden impulse. "But are you—are you well pleased that accident should have thus revealed to me——"

"Charles—my dear boy," interrupted Mr. Hatfield, summoning all his firmness to his aid, "you must be aware that weighty reasons—the weightiest reasons—could alone have induced your mother and myself to practise a deception towards you and the world in respect to the degree of relationship in which you really stood with regard to us. Is it sufficient for you to know at last that you are our son?—or do you demand of me an explanation wherefore you must still pass as our *nephew?*"

"Oh! then Lord Ellingham spoke truly as he brought me hither just now!" cried Charles, in a tone of vexation: then, in another moment brightening up, he added feelingly, "But by what right do I dare to question the conduct of parents who have ever treated me so kindly? No—my dear father—I seek not any explanation at your hands—I am content to obey your wishes in all things."

"Generous youth!" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield. "Though you must pass as my nephew, Charles, yet in all respects shall you continue to be treated as my son! You are doubtless aware that I am rich—very rich;—and all that your mother and myself possess is bequeathed to you."

"One word, father—only one word!" cried Charles. "I have an ardent longing to ask a single question—and yet I dare not—no—I cannot tutor my lips to frame the words——"

"Speak!" said Mr. Hatfield, emphatically: "I can almost divine the question you hesitate to put to me."

"Ah! my dear father—I would rather know the truth at once than remain in suspense, a prey to a thousand wild conjectures—the truth regarding one point—and only one!" repeated the young man, in an earnest and imploring tone. "And imagine not," he continued, speaking with increased warmth and rapidity, "that I should ever look less lovingly or less respectfully upon my dear mother—if——"

"Set that suspicion at rest, my son," interrupted Mr. Hatfield, in a solemn manner. "Your mother has ever been an angel of innocence and purity! As God is my judge she has never been guilty of weakness

or frailty—no—never—never!" he added emphatically.

"And therefore no stigma is upon my birth?" asked Charles, his heart palpitating—or rather fluttering violently, as he awaited the response.

"None!" replied his father, with an effort which was, however, unnoticed by the young man in the excitement of his own feelings.

"God be thanked!" exclaimed he, wringing Mr. Hatfield's hand in gratitude for this assurance. "And now I seek to learn no more."

CHAPTER CXXII.

TWO OF THE READER'S OLD FRIENDS.

BUCKLESBURY—a tortuous street, leading from Cheapside to Walbrook—abounds in dining-rooms, where for fifteen pence the "City man" can procure a meal somewhat on the "cheap and nasty" principle. There's ten-pence for a plate of meat, cut off a joint—two-pence, a pint of porter—a penny, potatoes—a penny, bread—and a penny the waiter.

The moment a person enters one of these establishments and seats himself at a table, a waiter with a dirty apron to his waist, and a ditto napkin over his arm, rushes up, and gabbles through the bill-of-fare, just in the same rapid and unintelligible manner as an oath is administered to a juryman or a witness in a court of justice.

It was while the preceding scenes were taking place at the West End of London, that two gentlemen lounged into a dining-room in Bucklesbury, and took their places, facing each other, at one of the numerous little tables that were spread with dirty cloths and strown in a random fashion with knives, forks, salt-sellers, pepper-boxes, and vinegar-cruets,—all in preparation for the afternoon's process of "feeding."

Scarcely had the two gentlemen thus brought themselves to an anchor, when the waiter darted up to them as if the necessity of speed were a matter of life or death;—and, heedless whether the visitors were attending to him or not, the domestic functionary hurried over the list of delicacies at that moment in readiness in the kitchen.

"Roast beef—biled beef—roast leg of pork—biled leg of pork and pease pudding—fillet of veal and 'am—beef steak pie—biled leg of mutton and caper sarse—greens—colliflowers—and tatars. Give your orders, gentle-men."

But were the rapidity of the waiter's utterance properly represented in print, his repetition of the bill-of-fare would more properly stand thus:—

"Roast beef biled beef roast leg of pork biled leg of pork and pease pudding fillet of veal and 'am beef steak pie biled leg of mutton and caper sarse greens colliflowers and tatars give your orders gentle-men?"

"Well—what shall we have, old fellow?" said the younger gentleman of the two to his companion.

"Be 'Jasus! 'an it's afther boiled leg of por-r-rk and paze pudding that I am, my frind!" was the emphatic reply, delivered with a ferocious look at the waiter as much as to let that individual know that he had better not have any of his nonsense—although nothing was further from the poor devil's thoughts at the moment.

"Very good, sir!" cried the waiter. "Biled pork and pease pudding!" he shouted out for the behoof of the young lady within the bar at the remote end of the room.

"And the same for me," said the Irishman's companion.

"Same for gentle-man!" bawled the waiter, again addressing himself to the young lady just alluded to. "Ale or stout, gentle-men?"

"Porter—a pint!" exclaimed the ferocious Hibernian.

"Pale ale for me," intimated his friend.

"Pint of porter and pint pale ale for gentle-men!" vociferated the waiter. "Weggittables—bread?" he next demanded.

"No bread—greens!" ejaculated the Irishman.

"Bread and potatoes for me," said his companion.

"One bread—one greens—one tatars—for gentle-men!" cried the waiter, thus conveying his last instructions to the young lady who officiated at the bar; and the said young lady sent each fresh order down a pipe communicating with the kitchen—her own voice being as affected and her manner as lackadaisical as the waiter was natural, rapid, and bustling.

But before the various luxuries thus commanded were hoisted from the kitchen to the bar by means of the moveable dumb-waiter that worked up and down between the two places just mentioned,—we must pause to inform our readers—if indeed they have not already suspected the fact—that the two visitors to the dining-establishment in Bucklersbury, were our old friends Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Francis Curtis!

The gallant Irishman had now numbered sixty-four years; and although the lapse of time had rendered his head completely bald, and turned his whiskers and moustachios to a bright silver, the ferocity of his aspect remained unaltered, and his fiery disposition was unsubdued. He was still the terrible Captain O'Blunderbuss—ready to exchange shots with any one and on all occasions—and more devoted to potene than ever. His form was as erect as when in the prime of life; and his military coat, all frogged and braided, was buttoned over an ample chest that no stoop had contracted. The captain had grown somewhat stouter than when we took leave of him nineteen years previously to our present date; but his physical strength seemed to have remained unimpaired.

Frank Curtis was now forty-three. He also had "filled out," as the phrase is; but his countenance, in fattening, had lost nothing of its ignoble expression of self-sufficiency and impudent conceit; and his manner was as flippant as ever. Neither had he laid aside any portion of his mendacious habits, but had rather added thereto by varying the style of his boastings and the nature of his lies. He continued to dress in a flashy way—delighting in a hat of strange appearance, and in a waistcoat concentrating in a yard of stuff all the colours which have existence and name upon earth.

We must however admit—for the truth cannot be blinked in this respect—that there was a certain air of seediness about both the captain and Mr. Frank Curtis, which neither the bullying insolence of the former nor the impertinent self-sufficiency of the latter could altogether throw into the shade. It was evident that they had lost the confidence of their tailors and hatters—and even of their washerwomen;—for their garments might have been less thread-bare, and their wristbands a trifle cleaner. We say "wristbands," because those were the only portions of their shirts which met the eye—the captain's frogged coat and Mr. Curtis's faded double-breasted waistcoat being each buttoned up to its owner's throat.

"Waiter-r!" vociferated the gallant officer, when about a minute and a half had elapsed from the time that the orders had been given for the repast.

"Yes, sir—coming, sir," cried the functionary thus addressed, as he hurried away in quite another direction.

"Be Jasus!" ejaculated the captain, thumping his fist so vigorously down upon the table that the pepper box danced the polka with the mustard-pot, and the knives and forks performed a *pas de quatre*. "Is that boiled por-r-rk and paze pudding afther coming to-day at all, at all?"

"Just coming, sir!" said the waiter, under no excitement whatever, though in an immense bustle—for waiters always remain cool and imperturbable when most in a hurry.

"If it do n't come in sivin seconds, ye villain," thundered the captain, "I'll skin ye alive!"

"Very good, sir," said the waiter, as he hastened to attend upon some new-comers.

"The beauty of the French eating-houses is that the moment you order things they appear on the table by magic," observed Frank Curtis, in a tone loud enough to let every one present know that he had been in France. "When I was in Paris—on that secret mission from the English Government, you know, captain—"

"Be Jasus! and I remimber quite well," exclaimed the gallant officer. "T was at the same time that I went to offer my swor-r-d and services to the Imperor of the Tur-r-rks—the Sulthan, I mane."

"Just so," said Frank. "Well—as I was going to tell you—"

"Two biled pork—two pease pudding—for gentle-men," cried the waiter at this juncture, as he set the plates upon the table. "One-bread—one greens—one tatars—for gentle-men."

The captain and Mr. Curtis fell to work upon the delicacies thus placed before them; and after an interval of silence, during which the boiled pork and *et ceteras* disappeared with astonishing rapidity, the latter leaning across the table, said in a low whisper, "It was a deuced lucky thing that I met my friend Styles just now; for if he had n't lent me this sovereign, we might have gone without dinner as well as without breakfast."

"Be Jasus! and that's thrue enough, Frank!" returned the gallant officer, likewise in *sotto voce*. "Where did ye appint to mate Misther Styles again this afternoon?"

"At a nice quiet little public that I know of—where there's a good parlour and capital spirits," answered Mr. Curtis.

"Ah! the thrue potheen—the rale cratur!" said the captain. "Well that's a blissing, at all evints! And, be Jasus! I hope your frind Misther Styles will be after putting us up to do a something, as he suggested—for, be the power-r-is! Frank, it's hard work looking about for the sinews of war-r-r!"

"Styles is a splendid fellow, captain," replied Mr. Curtis, smacking his lips after his last glass of pale ale—or "palale," as the waiter denominated it. "Why, God bless you! it was him who got up the London and Paris Balloon Conveyance Company, with Parachute Branches to Dover and Calais."

"And how came it to fail?" demanded the gallant officer.

"Simply because it was never meant to succeed," answered Frank, in a matter-of-fact way. "The object was to make money by showing the balloons and

parachutes that were to be used in the business; and the press took up the affair quite seriously. As long as curiosity was kept alive, Styles cleared upwards of five guineas a-day by the admissions at a shilling a-head. Ah! he's a clever fellow—a deuced clever fellow, I can tell you. But its pretty near time we went to meet him: for, though he has n't any thing particular to do at present, he always pretends to be in a hurry, and never waits one minute over the hour for an appointment:—that's the way he has got himself the character of a man of punctuality and business-habits."

"Waiter-r!" vociferated Captain O'Blunderbuss.

"Coming, sir!" cried the functionary thus adjured: then, rushing up to the table, he said interrogatively, "Cheese, gentle-men?"

"No. What 's to pay?" demanded Curtis.

The waiter enumerated the items in a rapid manner, and mentioned the amount, which was forthwith discharged by Frank, who ostentatiously threw down a sovereign as if he had plenty more of the same kind of coin in his pocket. On receiving his change, he gave the waiter sixpence—a specimen of liberality which induced that discriminating personage to disregard all the other demands made at the moment upon his services, until he had duly escorted the two gentlemen to the door.

Upon quitting the dining-rooms, Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Frank Curtis proceeded arm-in-arm into Cheapside; and, on catching a glimpse of the clock of Bow Church, the latter gentleman said, "We are 'n lots of time. It's only half-past two—and we're to meet Styles at three at a public in Fleet Street. So we need n't gallop along as if a troop of sheriffs' officers were at our heels."

"Be Jasus! d'ye remimber what fine fun we had with the snaking scoundrels up in Baker Street?" cried the gallant officer. "Why—it must be upwards of twenty years ago—or nineteen at the last!"

"Yes—and do you remember what larks we had in the Bench too, during the time that the sleepy old Commissioners remanded me for?" said Curtis.

"Be the holy poker-r! and I've forgo. Ten nothing of all that same!" ejaculated the captain. "But it was a sad blow to ye, my frind, when Sir Christopher died without laying ye a single sixpence!"

"I can't bear to think of it, captain—although a dozen years or more have passed since then. But who do you think I saw the other day, riding in her carriage just as if she had been a lady all her life?"

"Be Jasus! and ye mane Sir Christopher's wife that was!" exclaimed the gallant officer. "Had she got the fine stout livery-servant standing up behind as usual?"

"Yes—and young Blunt was inside," added Curtis. "He's as like the stout footman as ever a lad was to a middle-aged man in this world—the same pudding face—sandy hair—stupid-looking eyes——"

"Now be the power-rs! I think you're too hard upon the footman, Frank!" interrupted the captain. "He's not such an ugly fellow as you would be after making him out. I don't say, for instance, that he's so handsome as you, my dear frind—or yet so well made as me, Frank——"

"Very far from it, captain," cried Mr. Curtis. "I don't think that we're the worst looking chaps in Cheapside at this moment. That's exactly what Styles said to us this morning. 'I want a couple of genteel fellows like you,' says he, 'to join me in something that I have in hand.'"

"We're the very boys to co-operate with him, Frank!" exclaimed the captain: "and what's more, you and me can play into ache-other's hands. 'Tis n't for nothing that we've been frinds for the last twenty years."

"In which time we've seen many ups and downs, captain," observed Frank,—“had many a good dinner, and gone many a time without one—spent many a guinea, and seen many a day when we did n't know where the devil to get a shilling——"

"Be the power-rs! and had many a rar-r lar-r-rk into the bargain!" said Captain O'Blunderbuss. "D'ye remimber our gitting into the station-house the night after your dear wife left ye to jine the old gentleman that fell in love with her, and——"

"And who was kind enough to take her off my hands, children and all!" exclaimed Frank, laughing heartily. "Ah! that was a glorious business—that was—I mean, old Shipley relieving me of my dear spouse and the five responsibilities."

"And did n't I conduct the bargain for ye?" demanded the captain. "Did n't I make him pony down a thousand pounds to prevint an action of *crim. con.*? Be the potheen of ould Ireland—I did that same business as nate and clane as iver such a thing was settled in this wor-r-rld!"

"True enough, captain," said Frank. "But it's just on the stroke of three, I declare!" he exclaimed, glancing up at Saint Bride's, which they were now passing. "How we must have dawdled along! I wish you would n't loiter to stare at the gals so, captain," he added, laughing.

"Be Jasus! and it's yourself, Frank, that ogles all the lasses that we mate," cried the captain, throwing back an insinuation that was intended as a friendly compliment. "But which is the place, me boy?"

"Here," said Curtis, turning into a public-house in Fleet Street just as the clock struck three.

CHAPTER CXXIII.

A MAN OF BUSINESS.

MR. BUBBLETON STYLES was a gentleman of about fifty years of age. Short, thin, dapper, and active,—with a high, bald forehead, and small restless, twinkling eyes,—he seemed a perfect man of business—an impression that was enhanced by a certain sly knowingness which he had assumed years before, and which was now habitual to him. He was uneducated and ignorant: but he had studied the manner in which well-instructed persons spoke—he compared their language with his own—and he had actually weeded his style of speech of the solecisms and grammatical errors that originally characterised it. He had not, however, been able to improve himself in spelling, with equal facility; and therefore he took care never to write a letter. He always had some plausible excuse for throwing this duty in business matters upon some other person more competent than himself.

Astute and cunning, he forebore from touching on topics which he did not understand: but if the conversation did turn, in spite of his endeavours to the contrary, on subjects whereof he was ignorant, he so artfully managed his observations that even those who knew him well were far from suspecting that he was otherwise than profoundly acquainted with the matter under discussion. Every body thought him a

very shrewd fellow;—and he had a habit of looking so knowing and critical when any one was speaking, that his opinion, when subsequently delivered, was received with respect and deemed an authority.

The reader may therefore perceive that Mr. Bubbleton Styles was a thorough man of the world. He took care never to commit himself. In small money transactions he was always regular and correct: he therefore escaped the imputation of meanness, and actually acquired at a cheap rate the denomination of "an honourable character." The consequence was, that when he failed—which was very often indeed—in large transactions, he was considered merely as "a spirited but unsuccessful speculator,"—never as a dishonest person.

He had an office in the City: but were any of his friends to ask, "What is Styles?" the answer would be a vague generality—such as, "Oh! he is a City man, you know—engaged in business and all that!"—a reply leaving the enquirer just as wise as he was before. And yet, at his office, there were all the symptoms and evidence of "business,"—a letter-box at the door—a clerk engaged in writing at the desk—a pile of letters here, and a heap of account-books there—samples of many kinds of goods on the mantel and shelves—mysterious-looking bales and hampers on the floor—files covered with dingy papers, looking like invoices and bills of lading—and the words *Bills for Acceptance* labelled over a slit in the board-work that enclosed the desk. Thus the place had a very business-like aspect: and yet no one could define what was the precise nature of the business carried on there.

But we have travelled to Mr. Bubbleton Styles's office in Crosby Hall Chambers; whereas Mr. Bubbleton Styles himself is just now in a tavern-parlour in Fleet Street.

The clock had just begun to strike three as Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Frank Curtis entered the public-house: and by the time they reached the aforesaid parlour it was six seconds *post* three.

There sat Mr. Bubbleton Styles—with his silver watch in his hand, and gazing at the Dutch clock over the mantel-piece, as if he were anxiously comparing the two dials, and found himself much put out because there happened to be a slight difference between them.

"If I thought it was my watch that was wrong," he said aloud, apparently in a musing manner, but really because he caught a glimpse of the entrance of Curtis and Blunderbuss at the moment, and he never lost an opportunity of impressing even his best friends with an idea of his punctuality,—“if I thought it was my watch that was wrong, I would trample it to pieces beneath my heel.”

"No—don't do that, old fellow!" exclaimed Frank, advancing towards him. "Much better give it to me!"

"I would not do any thing so prejudicial to a friend as present him with a watch that went irregularly," returned Mr. Styles, in a solemn tone. "But the fault is *not* with my watch, I am convinced: it lies with that rascally old clock. However, you are only six seconds after your time: I should have allowed you the full minute—and then I should have waited no longer. Come, sit down, Curtis—Captain O'Blunderbuss, sit down: I have just one hour to devote to you. As the clock strikes four, I must be off. What will you take?"

"Potteen for me, if ye please," said the gallant officer.

"Brady for me," observed Frank.

"And wine-and-water for me," added Mr. Bubbleton Styles. "I never take spirits until after supper."

The various beverages required, were immediately ordered and supplied; and the three gentlemen proceeded to business, the parlour at the tavern—or rather public-house—being occupied only by themselves at the moment.

"Well, old fellow," said Mr. Frank Curtis, addressing himself to Mr. Styles, "what good thing can you put us up to?"

"A speculation that will enrich us all three," replied the gentleman thus appealed to. "I do not mind telling you that I have been rather unfortunate lately in one or two enterprises—and I want something to set me square again. I have a few bills coming due in a couple or three months, and would not have them dishonoured on any account. Thank God! however, I have no paltry debts—no mean milk-scores—no peddling affairs. I always avoid them. Still I must make a bold stroke for the sake of my larger transactions;—and I presume that neither of you are averse to earning a little money easily and speedily."

"Arrah! and be Jasus! that's the most welcome thing ye could be afther saying to me, my frind!" exclaimed the captain, surveying the speculator with deep admiration.

"Now," continued Mr. Styles, "I have been thinking that we three can work the oracle well together—and I propose—"

"What?" demanded Mr. Curtis, anxiously.

"I would your tongue—and have patience, Frank!" ejaculated the gallant officer. "It shall be your turn to spake prisintly. Well, sir—and what is it, thin, that ye're afther proposing!"

"A Railway!" returned Mr. Bubbleton Styles.

"Divil a better idea could ye have formed!" cried the captain, enthusiastically.

"Glorious!" exclaimed Curtis, in an equally impassioned tone of approval.

"Don't be excited—take things calmly—in a business-like way," said Mr. Bubbleton Styles. "It is now twenty minutes past three: we have forty minutes more to converse upon the subject. Much may be done in that time. Here," continued the speculator, drawing a skeleton-map of England from his pocket, and spreading it on the table; "you see this line drawn almost longitudinally from one end of Great Britain to the other? Well—that is my projected Railway. You perceive, we start from Beachy Head in Sussex—right on, as straight as we can go, to Cape Wrath on the northern coast of Scotland. Of course we avoid as much as possible placing any portion of our line in competition with railways already existing; but we shall have Branches to all the principal cities and manufacturing towns, and Single Lines wherever they may be asked for."

"Capital, be Jasus!" exclaimed the Hibernian officer, unable to restrain the exuberance of his delight at this magnificent scheme. "And be what title d'ye mane to call this purty little bantling of your's, Misther Styles?"

"The Grand British Longitudinal Railway," answered the speculator, in a measured and emphatic manner.

The captain was so elated by the grandeur and vast comprehensiveness of this denomination, that he rang the bell with furious excitement, and ordered the waiter to replenish the glasses.

"Now," continued Mr. Bubbleton Styles, "having expounded my views, it is necessary to take into con-

sideration the mode of procedure. Of course I am the promoter of the scheme; and to-morrow I shall register it. This will only cost five pounds—and then the thing is secured to us. *'Provisionally Registered, pursuant to 7 and 8 Victoria, cap. 110;—and so forth. Capital £8,000,000, in 400,000 shares of £20 each. Deposit, £2 2s. per share. You, Frank, must be the Secretary; and you, captain, Consulting Engineer.'*

"Is it an Engineer ye'd be after making of me in my ould age?" cried the gallant officer: "for, be the power-rs! I've forgot more than I ever knew of that same!"

"Oh! the place will be quite a sinecure—good pay and nothing to do," said Mr. Styles. "We shall have a regular Engineer, as a matter of course; but it will look business-like to speak in the prospectus of having *'secured the valuable services of that eminent Military Engineer, Captain O'Blunderbuss, of Blunderbuss Park, Ireland; who, having surveyed the whole of the proposed line, in concert with the Company's Civil Engineer, has reported most favourably of the scheme, and has offered suggestions which will produce a saving to the Company of nearly half a million sterling in the progress of the works.'* This is the way to manage business, gentlemen," added Mr. Styles, glancing in a satisfied manner at his two companions, one after the other: then, looking at his watch, he exclaimed, "Just ten minutes more to stay—and I must be off! Now, we have settled that I am to be Promoter—you, Curtis, are to be Secretary—and you, captain, Consulting Engineer. This evening I will draw up the prospectus: we must have about thirty good names for the Provisional Committee—and by to-morrow afternoon the document will be printed and ready."

"You will not have time to call on the people to ask them to let you put down their names?" said Frank Curtis, conceiving at the moment that his friend was going a trifle too fast.

"Nonsense, my dear fellow!" exclaimed Mr. Bubbleton Styles: "I know that I can take the liberty of using the names of at least half of my intended Provisional Committee-men; and the others will not think of contradicting the prospectus, when they see that we have got Mr. Podgson as chairman."

"What—Podgson!" cried Mr. Curtis, almost wild with joy and surprise. "You don't mean to say that you've got Podgson?"

"Not yet," answered the speculator, with his characteristic coolness: but I *shall* have him by this time to-morrow."

"I thought that you had not spoken of your scheme to a soul before you met me and the captain this morning—"

"Neither had I—and Podgson is totally unaware at this moment that such a project is in existence," interrupted Mr. Styles, calmly and deliberately. "But I know how to deal with him: I have read his character from a distance;—and, although I have never yet exchanged a word with him in my life, depend upon it I shall hook him as our chairman before I am twenty-four hours older. Three minutes more!" cried the speculator: then, as if to make the most of the hundred and eighty seconds at his disposal, Mr. Styles closed the present interview in the following business-like and highly gratifying manner:—"You are both as shabby as you well can be; and you must obtain new clothes as soon as possible. Here is a ten-pound note for each of you. Moreover you must get re-

spectable lodgings at once; and you can give a reference to me. To-morrow, at three o'clock punctually, there will be chops and sherry in readiness at my office—and I shall expect you both. Not a moment before three, remember—because you will be interrupting me: and if you're a moment after, I shall decline any farther transactions with you. So good bye—I have n't time to shake hands."

Thus speaking, Mr. Styles rushed from the room, it being four o'clock to an instant;—and it is perhaps as well to observe that this perfect man of business had only made an appointment with his friends at the public-house in Fleet Street, because he had another gentleman to meet in the neighbourhood at six minutes past four.

CHAPTER CXXIV

CHARLES HATFIELD.

It was past midnight; and in only one chamber throughout the Earl of Ellingham's spacious mansion was a light still burning.

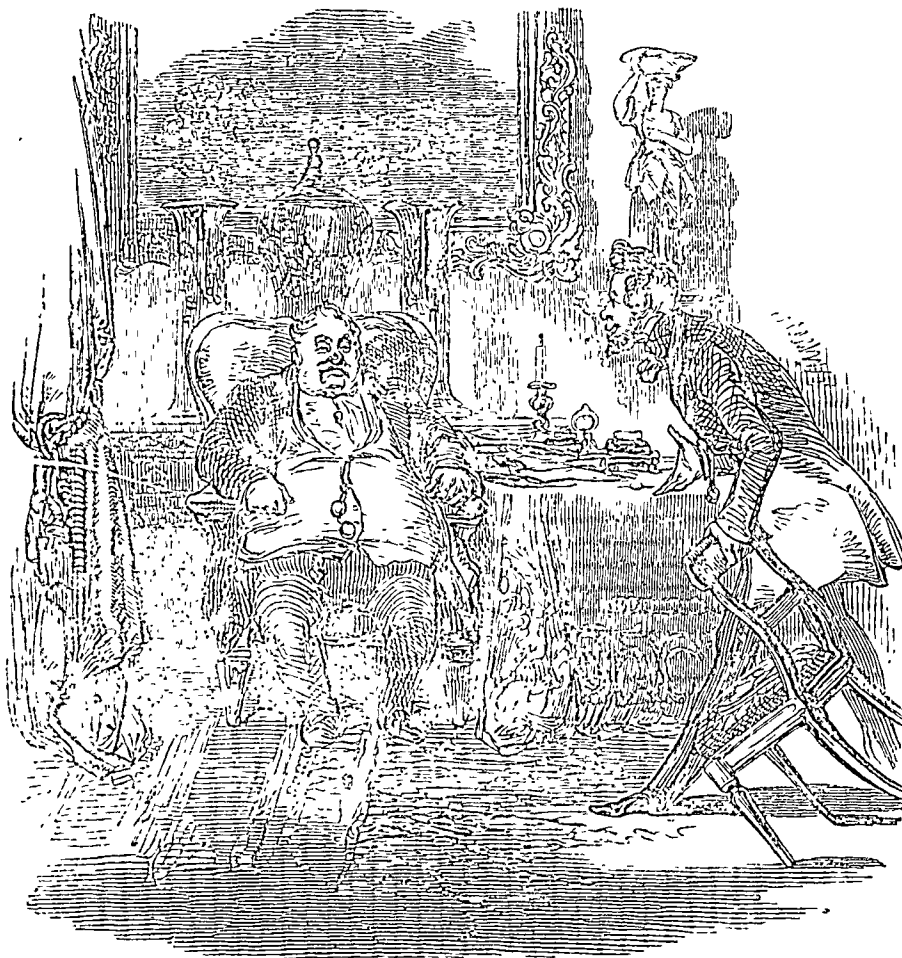
In that chamber Charles Hatfield was pacing to and fro—his mind filled with thoughts of so bewildering, exciting, and painful a nature, that he felt the inutility of endeavouring to escape from them by retiring to his couch.

This young man of twenty-five years of age,—so handsome, so intelligent, and with the certainty of inheriting vast riches,—possessing the most brilliant worldly prospects, and knowing himself to be the object of his parents' devoted affection—entertaining, too, a profound love for the beautiful Lady Frances Ellingham, and having every reason to hope that his passion was reciprocated,—this young man, with so many advantages in respect to position, and so many sources of felicity within his view,—Charles Hatfield was restless and unhappy.

The striking incident which had marked the day—the sudden discovery that those whom he had hitherto looked upon as his uncle and his aunt, were in reality his parents,—the assurance which he had received respecting the honour of his mother and the legitimacy of his birth,—then the mysterious fact that his parentage was still to remain a secret to the world,—all these circumstances combined to torment him with doubts and misgivings—to excite his curiosity to a painful degree—and to animate him with an ardent longing to penetrate into all that was so obscure and suspicious.

It was true that he had promised his mother never to question her relative to a subject that might be disagreeable to her;—for the moment, too, he had been satisfied with the assurances of his legitimacy which he had received from the lips of his father. But when he found himself alone in his own bed-chamber—surrounded by the stillness of night—he could no longer check the natural current of his reflections;—the deep silence in which the mansion was enveloped—the secluded position of his apartment—and the slightly romantic turn of his mind,—all united to give an impulse to thoughts which were so intimately associated with subjects of mysterious and strange import.

Then, many circumstances, remembered in connexion with his early boyhood, but until now never before pondered upon with serious attention,—recollections, hitherto vague and disjointed,—gradually assumed a more intelligible aspect to his mental contemplation



—memory exerted herself with all her energy, to fill up blanks and bring vividly forward those reminiscences that until this moment had been like dim and misty vapours floating before the mind's eye:—he fixed his gaze intently on the past, until the feeblest glimmerings assumed a bolder and more comprehensible light;—and by degrees the confusion of his ideas relative to his early being, yielded to something like order—so that he became enabled to fit incidents into their proper places, and even make some accurate calculations with regard to the dates of particular occurrences.

In a word, a light had streamed in upon his soul—illuminating many of the hitherto unexplored cells of his memory,—giving significancy to recollections on which he had never before paused to ponder, and investing with importance various reminiscences that had not until this period engaged his serious attention.

Naturally of a happy—cheerful disposition,—and intent on soaring aspirations relative to the future, rather than on speculations and wanderings connected with the past,—he had never until now been struck with certain facts which, though having a dwelling-place in his memory, had failed to occupy his meditations or excite any thing like suspicions in his mind.

But the incident of the day had set him to work, in the silence of his chamber and the depth of night, to call forth all those sleeping reminiscences—examine them one by one—connect them together—make them up as well as he could into a continuous history—and from the aggregate deduce a variety of truths intimately regarding himself.

All this was not done through any disrespect for his mother or his father—any change of feeling in reference to them. No:—he loved them the more tenderly—the more fervently, now that he knew they were *his parents*, and not *mere relations*. But if he fell into the train of thought in which we now find him engaged, it was that he could no more help yielding to that current of reflections than a child could avoid being carried whirlingly along the rapids of the Canadian stream which had engulfed it.

And now let us see into what connected form the meditations and recollections of Charles Hatfield had settled themselves?

Seating himself at the table, on which he leant his elbows, and supporting his head on his hands, in which he buried his face, he pondered in the ensuing manner.—

“My earliest remembrances carry me back to a

period when I must have been about five years old; and then I was accustomed to call a good woman whose name was Watts, my *mother*. But she died—I forget precisely under what circumstances; and then, when I was nearly six, I was taken care of by a gentleman named Rainford. Yes—and he had a beautiful wife named Tamar;—and this Tamar was the sister of the Countess of Ellingham. Mr. Rainford and Tamar were very kind to me, I remember well; but I was not with them long. And now there is so much confusion in my thoughts—so much bewilderment in my reminiscences touching that particular period in my life, that I scarcely know how to render my ideas continuously accurate. I fully recollect, however, that he whom I grew accustomed to call by the endearing name of ‘*father*’—although I knew that he was not my father—I mean this Mr. Rainford,—I recollect, I say, that he was absent for some weeks, and that I pined after him. Then Tamar would reassure me with promises of his return;—but I remember that she used to weep very much—oh! very much! One day she put on black clothes—and she was going to dress me in mourning also; but she cried bitterly, and threw the dark garments away. Next I recollect being taken to the house of Mr. de Medina, where I saw Esther for the first time—that Esther who is now Countess of Ellingham. The happiness I experienced that day dwells in my mind; for I recollect as well as if it were but yesterday, that all Tamar’s sorrow had suddenly disappeared, and that she gave me the most earnest promises that I should soon see Mr. Rainford again.* And I did behold him again soon—but it was at some town in France, whither I was taken by Mr. de Medina and his two daughters.† Then we all travelled in a post-chaise and four—and we repaired to Paris, where I remember that the Earl of Ellingham and Jacob Smith joined us.‡ Next we went to Havre-de-Grace—I remember it was that town, because I have seen it since; and there Mr. de Medina, Esther, and the Earl of Ellingham left us—Mr. Rainford, Tamar, Jacob Smith, and myself going on board of a ship.§ We were not very long at sea, but the next incident which I remember was travelling alone with Tamar to London, where we took up our abode at the country-seat of Mr. de Medina.|| That was at Finchley. We never went out, I remember—but kept close to our own room, Esther and Mr. de Medina frequently visiting us. How long we lived in this manner I cannot recollect: but now my mind settles with horror on the never-to-be-forgotten lamentation which, child as I was, struck horror to my soul as it echoed through the dwelling! For Mr. de Medina and Esther had suddenly learnt that Tamar—the good, kind Tamar—who had been absent a considerable time that day, was foully and brutally murdered. Oh! how I cried—how bitterly I wept: but if I asked any questions—which I must naturally suppose that I did—they were not answered, or were answered vaguely. Yes—all particulars were carefully kept from me;—and this was doubtless nothing more than a mere matter of prudence—for I was but a child of between six and seven! Mr. Rainford now came back to live at Finchley; but how unhappy he was! I remember well one evening—a very few days only after the dreadful death of her whom I was wont to call ‘*my mamma*’—that Mr. Rainford, after

a long conversation in whispers with Lord Ellingham, suddenly turned towards me—caught me up in his arms—and covered me with kisses. Yes—that incident has ever remained indelibly impressed upon my memory!¶ It was followed very soon by Tamar’s funeral; and almost immediately afterwards I was sent to a school at a great distance—for I remember that Mr. de Medina and Esther themselves took me there, and that we travelled all day in a post-chaise. Ah! and now I recollect too—yes—it flashes to my mind, that before they left me they charged me never to mention the name of Rainford at the school;—for my own name was at that time Charles Watts. For three years did I remain there, Mr. de Medina and Esther frequently visiting me, even after she had become the Countess of Ellingham. Every six months I went home to Finchley for the holidays, and found Mr. Rainford always staying at Mr. de Medina’s house, and always ready to receive me with kindness. Then Mr. de Medina died; and we all went into mourning for him. I returned to school for another year; and when between ten and eleven I was suddenly sent for home—that is, to the manor-house at Finchley, which Mr. Rainford had continued to occupy after Mr. de Medina’s death. But instead of seeing Mr. Rainford, as I had expected, I was taken into the presence of a gentleman and a lady, neither of whom I had ever beheld before. These were Mr. Hatfield and Lady Georgiana!

Here the young man paused in his meditations, as if to fix all his powers of thought with as much intensity as possible upon that era of his life whence dated as it were a new existence. But his ideas came rushing in upon his soul with such overwhelming force, as literally to hurry him along; and, obedient to the current of continuous and self-linking reflections he thus proceeded in that silent history which he was repeating to himself:—

“And what were my first impressions on entering into the presence of Mr. Hatfield and Lady Georgiana? I scarcely know now—for I remember that the lady snatched me to her bosom—folded me in a fond embrace—covered me with kisses—and even wept over me. It was the first time I had ever seen her, to my recollection. Mr. Hatfield then embraced me in his turn, and with as much fervour as if he had been the Mr. Rainford whom I had expected to meet and to behold! I was then, as I just now reckoned, between ten and eleven when all this happened; and it struck me—I recollect it well—that there was a considerable likeness between Mr. Rainford and Mr. Hatfield:—but then Mr. Rainford had light hair, and Mr. Hatfield black,—Mr. Rainford had reddish whiskers, and those of Mr. Hatfield were dark as jet. Yes: those were my ideas at the time; but I suppose that they were the offspring of a delusion. Nevertheless, when I call to mind the features of that Mr. Rainford who was so good to me in my infancy, it even seems now that I can recollect a resemblance between them and the countenance of my own father such as it now is. Still, this is most probably mere fancy;—and I wish to arrive at truths, not indulge in idle speculations. Well, then—to go back to that interview,—that first interview between myself and those who have since turned out to be my parents,—I can call to mind each look they bestowed upon me—each word they uttered. They told me that they were my uncle and my aunt

* See Chapter LIX.

† See Chapter LXIV.

‡ See last paragraph of Chapter LXV.

§ See Chapter LXXIX.

|| This was when Rainford quitted the packet-ship at Guernsey, and commenced his career as the Blackamoor.

¶ See first paragraph, second column, page 23, of this Volume of the Second Series.

—that they were rich, and intended to have me to live with them altogether thenceforth, and be recognised as their heir—that Mr. Rainford had gone upon a long, long voyage to settle in a far-off land, whence perhaps he should never return—and that they would supply the place of the parents whom I had lost in my infancy and of the generous friend who had thus quitted his native shores for ever! There was so much in the voice—manner—and language of Mr. Hatfield which reminded me of Mr. Rainford, that this circumstance materially consoled me for the deprivation of my long-loved protector; and I was moreover just at that age when kindness, handsome clothes, indulgence, and the change of scene which immediately followed, were fully calculated to attach me to those who gave me so many enjoyments. Thus, I am afraid that I was ungrateful to the memory of Mr. Rainford—by loving Mr. Hatfield too soon and too well,—for I could not then suspect that he was my father;—no—nor did I ever until the truth burst so suddenly on me this day! But, ah! it was nature which prompted that feeling;—and I remember well how joyous and happy I was when told, on the occasion of that first interview, that thenceforth I must bear the name of *Hatfield*!”

Here he paused again, as if in doubt whether he had omitted any detail, reminiscence, or incident which should constitute a link in the narrative that he was endeavouring, in his progressive thoughts, to render as complete as possible;—and solemnly—profoundly interesting would it have been for a human observer, himself unobserved, to have contemplated that fine and handsome young man, thus devoting the hours when others slept to the task of tracing, by memorial efforts, his career from the days of infancy to the present moment! But no eye beheld him save that of Him who beholdeth all things, and who sleepeth never!

“Scarcely had I thus been taken into the care of Mr. and Lady Georgiana Hatfield,—it was thus he proceeded in his continuous meditations,—“when we repaired to the Continent. Having travelled through France, we crossed the Alps, and entered the delicious land of Italy. The Sardinian States were traversed by us in that leisurely manner which allowed us to view every thing worthy of inspection;—for some weeks we stayed at Florence, the capital of the beautiful Grand Duchy of Tuscany;—thence we journeyed to Rome,—and for several months did we sojourn in the Eternal City. But the health of a young man who was with us, and whose name was Jacob Smith, required a change of climate. Mr. Hatfield was deeply attached to this youth, who, on his side, treated my father with the utmost deference and devotedness. The Roman physicians recommended the genial air of Montoni; and we accordingly removed to the sovereign city of Castelcicala. But Jacob Smith appeared to have some secret sorrow preying upon him; and he pined away before our very eyes. Yes—he had a secret source of grief: for I remember well now, that one night he uttered dreadful screams and ejaculations in his sleep, which awoke and alarmed me—for I slept in the next room to him. I recollect that I rushed in, fearful lest his chamber had caught on fire; and that before I could arouse him, he shrieked forth in thrilling tones—‘*Old Death—Benjamin Bones—my father! No—no!*’—Poor fellow, he died soon afterwards; and I wept much—for he was always kind and good to me! But that ejaculation of ‘*Old Death—Benjamin Bones!*’ even then seemed to touch some chord within my soul, as if awaking a

long dormant but vague reminiscence: and now again, that name of *Benjamin Bones*—that frightful appellation of *Old Death*,—Oh! they do not seem so unfamiliar to me as if I had never heard them mentioned but that once, and by the lips of Jacob Smith. Were not those names, in fact, in some way associated with recollections of a much earlier date? Did I never hear those names pronounced in my earliest boyhood? It appears to me that I did; and yet I vainly—oh! how vainly endeavour to plunge my eager glances through the mist—the dense, dark mist, which envelopes that idea,—reducing the thought to a suspicion so dim and vague that I dare not adopt it as a link in this history of mine! And yet why does the name of *Old Death* produce a kind of shuddering within me, as if the influence of a very early recollection still partially remained? Wherefore does the appellation of *Benjamin Bones* seem more familiar to me, than I can possibly conceive a reason for? There are moments when I appear to obtain the least glimmering—the least scintillation of a light at the remote profundity of this mystery,—a light which for an instant seems to promise an elucidation of all I wish to know in that respect, and then becomes suddenly extinguished—leaving me in a deeper and darker uncertainty than before!”

Charles Hatfield pressed his hands violently to his forehead, as if to awaken recollections that slumbered too soundly to be otherwise aroused: but he could not conjure up nor evoke a single idea that was calculated to throw any light on the obscurity which enveloped every thing in his mind respecting the two names, the utterance whereof thrilled to his very soul.

“What means that horrible phrase—*Old Death*?” he asked himself a hundred times: “and is it in any way connected with the name of *Benjamin Bones*? Is the phrase a name itself likewise? and if so, are *Old Death* and *Benjamin Bones* one and the same person? Why should those names produce upon me a disagreeable effect, as if I suddenly came in contact with a loathsome snake? I know not:—and yet it is so! The more I ponder upon that night when poor Jacob Smith shrieked out in his sleep—the more vivid do my recollections become concerning the horror that convulsed him, and the piercing—tense anguish which marked his tone! Oh! then, there must have been something dreadful—appalling—terrible in the associations which the names of *Old Death* and *Benjamin Bones* conjured up in the young man’s mind at the time; and this Benjamin Bones must have been a bad—a very bad person. But wherefore do I say ‘*must have been*?’ May he not be alive now? In a word—what do I know of him? Nothing! nothing! And yet—and yet, something seems to tell me that I did know more of him once than I do now! Perhaps, when I was a child, I heard evil things said of him,—things which have long since fled from my mind, leaving only a general and very faint impression behind—and that impression unfavourable to the object of it. Let me not then dwell longer on this point of my narrative—that narrative which I seek to compile from the myriads of ideas that until this night have been all scattered in my brain—never concentrated and reduced to order until now! Yes—from that chaos of memories, I have succeeded in rescuing reminiscences and thoughts sufficient to form a somewhat continuous and connected history;—and heaven must guide me, if its will so be, sooner or later to clear up all that is still obscure; and gratify my craving—ardent curiosity unto the fullest extent! But wherefore am I devoured

with this burning desire to know all that there may be to know relative to myself? Alas! 'tis in my nature: the incident of the day just past has suddenly aroused that curiosity within me—for I feel, I have an innate conviction that there is a mystery attached to my birth, the elucidation of which must some day or another have a powerful influence upon my destinies! And oh! if it should prove that I am pursuing investigations which must end in stamping me with the stigma of illegitimacy, and bringing to light the dishonour of my mother—But, no—no! this cannot be! My father would not otherwise have given me the solemn assurance that my mother is *an angel of innocence and purity, and never has been guilty of weakness or frailty!*"

Again he paused: and now he arose from his seat, and paced the room for several minutes—agitated by the fear that he was militating against the wishes, or perhaps even the interests, of kind parents, by venturing to give full rein to the impetuous curiosity that had seized upon him. And yet—as ere now observed—he could not restrain the ardour of that sentiment, which, more powerful than himself, engulfed him in its onward, eddying influence.

Resuming his seat,—resuming likewise his meditative attitude,—and with his countenance again buried in his hands,—the young man took up the chain of his thoughts from that point where he had suddenly broken off to reflect on the secret and mysterious influence which the words *Old Death* and *Benjamin Bones* produced upon him.

"I reached in my mental narrative that epoch when poor Jacob Smith died. I was then about thirteen—a little more than thirteen; and I mourned sincerely for him. Frequently did I visit his grave in the beautiful cemetery where he was buried; and often—often as I wandered on the bank of the clear and broad Ferretti, down to whose chrysal margin that cemetery stretched,—often did I marvel who that departed youth was—and what secret tie might have linked him to Mr. Hatfield! Years passed rapidly away,—years unmarked by any incident on which my mind need pause to ponder: I grew up—happy, gay, and seldom thinking of the past. The bright and shining future—decked with all the glorious and golden hues which a sanguine imagination could devise—was ever the topic of my thoughts. Oh! well so I recollect that when between eighteen and nineteen years of age, I began to comprehend the affairs of the great world—to study well the political condition of nations—and to observe that the State of Castelvicala languished under the tyranny of the Grand Duke Angelo. Then I longed to become a hero—to have an army at my command—to achieve the independence, not only of Castelvicala, but of all Italy. These aspirations continued until I became an enthusiast in the cause of freedom; and though of English birth, yet deeply—sincerely did I sympathise with the generous-hearted Castelvicalans, when the treachery and despotism of the Grand Duke Angelo called a mighty Austrian army into the State, to besiege and overawe the capital! But Providence suddenly sent a champion to rescue a fine country and a noble people from the power of the invaders. No Castelvicalan native—no Italian patriot watched the career of Richard Markham with so much anxiety, such burning hope, and such deep suspense as I! When I heard those persons who were his best-wishers in their hearts, shake their heads and declare that the Constitutional Cause could not possibly succeed with so

youthful a leader and such slender resources, I thought otherwise:—yes—I thought otherwise—because I wished otherwise. Then as victory after victory marked the progress of the hero—Estella, Piacere, and Abrantani giving their names to the triumphs of the Constitutional Army,—I longed—Oh! I longed to fly into the presence of the conqueror, and implore him to permit me to wield a sword in the same cause. But we were then prisoners as it were within the walls of Montoni, which was besieged by the Austrians; and while all was dismay—confusion—and terror around, I alone seemed to entertain a conviction as to the result. Nor was I mistaken: the Constitutional Army, under the command of Richard Markham, advanced to raise the siege—and beneath the walls of Montoni was fought the most sanguinary action of modern times. From morning's dawn till the evening, lasted that terrific encounter;—but at eight o'clock on that evening the capital was delivered. Yet why should I now dwell on all these incidents,—why detail to myself all that followed?—the flight of the Grand Duke Angelo—the accession of Alberto to the ducal throne—and the subsequent arrival of Richard Markham, then Prince of Montoni, to settle with his lovely wife, the Princess Isabella, in the capital of the State which owed so much to him! Never—never shall I forget the exuberant joy which greeted his return to Montoni; and to render that day the more remarkable, the Grand Duke, his father-in-law, had convoked for the first time the Chambers of Senators and Deputies, instituted by the new Constitution previously promulgated! And the first act of those Chambers was to recognise the Prince as heir-apparent to the throne; while the Grand Duke appointed him Captain-General of the Castelvicalan Army—that army which he had led to conquest and to glory! It was a joyous and a memorable day for me when Mr. Hatfield and Lady Georgiana, having left their cards at the palace, received an invitation to a ball given by the Grand Duke and Duchess to celebrate the arrival of their son-in-law and beauteous daughter;—for I was permitted to accompany those whom I at that time believed to be my uncle and my aunt. Then did I find myself in the presence of Royalty for the first time; and I was agreeably disappointed and surprised to discover that condescension, affability, and great kindness of manner were fully compatible with the loftiest rank,—for such was the bearing of the Grand Duke Alberto and his Duchess, as well as of the Prince and Princess of Montoni. From that time forth I have become almost a worshipper of his Royal Highness the Prince,—an enthusiastic admirer of his genius, his character, and his glorious achievements:—to me he appears unrivalled as a warrior, faultless as a statesman, and estimable as a man,—endowed with every virtue—every qualification that can ennoble him not only as an individual who created rank and honours for himself by his high merits, but who is also the most splendid specimen of Nature's aristocracy that the world has ever yet seen!"

The young man raised his head as he reached this climax in his thoughts; and as the light of the lamp beamed upon his countenance, it was reflected in eyes brilliant with enthusiasm and with the glow excited by a heart swelling with the loftiest aspirations.

"Oh! shall I ever be able to raise myself to eminence?" he exclaimed, clasping his hands together, as if in earnest appeal to heaven: "may I hope ever to make for myself a name which the whole world shall

pronounce with respect and admiration? But first—first,” he continued, still speaking aloud and in an excited tone,—“I must satisfy this ardent curiosity which has seized upon me! Wherefore all these dreadful mysteries?—wherefore do not my parents acknowledge me as their son, if I be really legitimate?—why am I still to pass as their nephew? Are they ashamed of me?—have I ever done ought to bring disgrace upon their name? No—no: and they gave me that name—their own name of Hatfield, and of their own accord! But who was the good woman, Sarah Watts, that I used to call by the title of *mother*?—why was I entrusted in my infancy to her care?—for what motive was it that my parents never took charge of me until I was upwards of ten years of age?—and who was that kind and generous Mr. Rainford that I loved so much, and whom I have not now heard of for many long—long years? Oh! I must find the solutions of all these mysteries—the answers to all these questions! Yes:—whatever be the result,—whatever be the consequences, I must tear away the veil which conceals so much of the *past* from my view!”

Charles Hatfield rose from his chair as he pronounced these last words with strong emphasis; and, beginning to pace the room in an agitated manner, he was repeating his impassioned determination to clear up all that was at present obscure and dark, when a remorse struck to his soul—producing a sensation that made him reel and stagger!

For had not he said to Lady Georgiana but a few hours previously—“*I now know that you are my mother—and I care to know nothing more! Never—never shall I question you concerning the past: the enjoyment of the present, and the hope which gilds the future—these are enough for me!*”

And had not he said to his sire—“*By what right do I dare to question the conduct of parents who have ever treated me so kindly? No—my dear father—I seek not any explanation at your hands—I am content to obey your wishes in all things.*”

Charles Hatfield was a young man of fine principles and noble feelings; and the solemn nature of those assurances, striking with suddenness and force upon his mind, filled him with bitter regret that he should have ever thought of violating such sacred pledges.

“No—no!” he exclaimed in an impassioned manner,—“I will not play so vile a part towards my parents—I will not render myself so little in my own estimation! Let me endeavour, rather, to fly from my thoughts—to crush, subdue, stifle this wicked curiosity which has seized upon me—let me indeed be contented with the happiness of the present and the hopes of the future, and not seek to tear away the veil that conceals the past! The secrets of my parents must be solemnly preserved from violation by my profane hands:—how dare I—presumptuous and wilful young man that I am,—how dare I institute a search into the private matters and histories of the authors of my being?”

Then—enraged and indignant with himself, in one sense, and satisfied with the timeous decision to which he had come in another—Charles Hatfield hastened to retire to his bed, where the exhaustion and fatigue of long and painful thought soon sealed his eyelids in slumber.

But will he succeed in crushing the sentiments of curiosity which have been awakened within him?—or is he already preparing the way, by this night's long meditation, for a vast amount of sorrow to fall upon and be endured by many?

CHAPTER CXXV.

THE PROJECTED RAILWAY COMPANY.

It was striking ten by all the clocks at the West End, on the morning of the day following the incidents which have occupied the five preceding chapters, when a cab drove with insane speed along a fashionable street, in that district of the metropolis just alluded to; and having stopped at the door of the best house in the said street, out leapt Mr. Bubbleton Styles, with a large roll of papers in his hand.

“I told you that you would not do it by ten o'clock,” said this gentleman, addressing the reproach, accompanied by an angry look, to the cab-man.

“Not done it by ten, sir!” exclaimed the astonished and indignant driver: “vy, it's on'y jest a-finished strikin' by every blessed clock in this here part o' the town.”

“Just finished striking!” cried Mr. Styles, pulling out his watch: “it's a minute and a quarter past ten, I tell you. Here's your fare.”

“Two bob, all the way from Crosby Chambers!” growled the man, turning the money over and over in a discontented fashion in the palm of his hand: “come, come—that won't jest do, if you please, sir. You promised me three bob if I brought you here by ten—”

“And you did not fulfil the bargain,” sharply interrupted Mr. Styles, as he hurried up the steps of the large house and knocked at the door, which was immediately opened by a servant in such a splendid—outrageously splendid livery—that no other indication was required to distinguish the mansion of a parvenu—or, in other words, a vulgar upstart. “Is Mr. Podgson at home?” demanded Mr. Styles.

“Yes, sir. Walk in, sir. What name, sir?” were the hurried phrases which came from the domestic's lips.

“Vell, ain't ye a-going to pay us the extra bob, you gent?” cried the cab-man, as he mounted sulkily to his seat and drew a sack round his knees although it was in the middle of summer—so strong is the force of habit.

Mr. Styles deigned no reply to this derogatory adjuration; but, having given his card to the servant, he entered the great man's great house—while the cab drove away at a pace which seemed to intimate that the horse had become as sulky as its master.

The hall was very magnificent: but every thing was new. The statues—the vases—the marble pillars—the gilding on the doors that opened into the ground-floor apartments—even to the liveries of the servants lounging about,—all was new! Mr. Styles was shown into a small parlour, where the pictures—the mirrors—the mantle ornaments—the furniture—the carpet—the hangings,—every thing there was likewise new. The paint scarcely seemed to have dried, nor the putty in the window-frames to have hardened.

In a few minutes the domestic, who had left Mr. Styles alone during that interval, returned with the intimation that Mr. Podgson would see him at once; and the railway projector was forthwith conducted up a wide and handsome marble stair-case—through a splendidly furnished ante-room—into a sumptuous apartment, where the great man was seated at a table covered with railway plans, letters, maps, newspapers visitors' cards, and Acts of Parliament, all scattered

about in a confusion, that had been admirably well studied and purposely arranged.

The impression of the *newness* of every thing in the mansion was strengthened in the mind of Mr. Bubbleton Styles at every pace which he had taken from the hall-door into the room where he now found himself. It appeared as if Mr. Podgson—or Mr. Podgson's wife—or both, had endeavoured to the utmost of human power to crowd the apartments, the stair-cases, the landings, and, in fact, every nook and corner, with as many evidences of wealth as possible. Fine paintings by old masters, set in bran new glittering frames, were hung in the very worst lights, and without the least regard to their relative styles, colouring, or subjects. Each room had two or three time-pieces in it; and as they were not in accordance with respect to the hour, Mr. Bubbleton Styles's ideas of precision and punctuality received a severe shock when he heard ten o'clock proclaimed half-a-dozen different times during the first twenty minutes which elapsed after he first set foot in the mansion. In a word, the entire aspect of the house was a reflection of the vulgar, untasteful, and self-sufficient minds of the "stuck-up people" who, having grown suddenly rich, did not know how to render their dwelling elegant and comfortable without making it gaudy and ridiculously ostentatious in its appointments.

Mr. Podgson was a short, stout, thick-set man, with an enormous stomach, a very wide back, and little stumpy legs. His head seemed to be stuck on his shoulders without the intervening aid of any neck at all; and his features were coarsely ugly, and totally inexpressive of even the slightest spark of intelligence. His tongue appeared to be much too large for his mouth, his speech being remarkably disagreeable: indeed, his free utterance seemed to be impeded as if he were always sucking a large lollipop, or had an enormous quid of tobacco stuck in his cheek. When he walked, it was with the most ungainly waddle that can possibly be conceived; and his clothes, though no doubt made by a fashionable tailor, sate upon him just as if they had been thrown on with a pitch-fork. Had this man been invested with regal robes,—had he arrayed himself in the Tyrian purple which Rome's Emperors were wont to wear,—he could not have looked otherwise than a low vulgarian,—which he was!

We shall not pause for a moment to give any account of the rise of Mr. Podgson from obscurity to that renown which the sudden acquisition of great wealth established for him. Having sprung from the people, he turned against the people when he became a rich man. His property enabled him to purchase a borough; and the instant he found himself in Parliament, he joined the Protectionists—the bitter enemies of the popular cause!

Had this man taken his place amongst the Liberals, we should not have remembered his physical ugliness and his immense vulgarity of manners: we should have admired and esteemed him. But *he* to associate with aristocrats,—to squeeze that squat, podgy form amongst the "exquisites" and the "exclusives" of the West End,—to affect the most refined notions, and ape every thing fashionable,—for *him* to do all this—Oh! it is really too ridiculous—too ludicrous—too absurd to permit us to keep our countenance when we think of it!

Persons cannot help being naturally vulgar, any more than they can help being ugly; but the vulgar should not thrust themselves into those scenes and spheres where they are certain to stand out in most ignoble prominence, thereby forcing on all be-

holders the effect of the ludicrous contrast;—neither should the ugly adopt such an awful swagger and assume an air of such insufferable self-complacency as to render themselves most disagreeably remarkable and conspicuous.

Mr. Podgson had acquired his immense wealth by railway speculations; and the disgusting sycophants who invariably attach themselves to rich men with weak minds, had nonsensically dubbed him the *Railway Lion*! Had they called him the *Railway Elephant*, in allusion to his unwieldy proportions—or the *Railway Bear*, in reference to his manners—or the *Railway Donkey*, in respect to his intelligence,—they would have been more faithful to truth. But the *Railway Lion* he was;—and it was now in the presence of this tremendous animal that Mr. Bubbleton Styles stood.

Without rising from his chair, Mr. Podgson, M.P., waved his hand with all the majesty of a stage-monarch; and as this gesticulation was intended to be a fashionable—no, a dignified mode of desiring Mr. Bubbleton Styles to be seated, Mr. Bubbleton Styles seated himself accordingly.

Mr. Podgson then stared very hard at his visitor; and this was the Railway Lion's method of intimating that he was "all attention."

"I believe, sir," said Mr. Styles, in a very polite and courteous manner—but without any thing like cringing servility,—“I believe, sir, that you last night received a letter from Alderman Tripes—”

"Oh! ah!" exclaimed Mr. Podgson, in his thick voice: "I remember! My very particular and intimate friend, Mr. Alderman Tripes, assures me in his communication that you have a famous project on the tappy—"

Mr. Podgson meant *tapis*—but could not precisely achieve the correct pronunciation.

"And that project I shall have much pleasure in submitting to you, sir," added Mr. Styles, proceeding to unfold the large roll of papers which he had brought with him.

"Well—I do n't mind—that is, to oblige you, I'll just look over them," said Mr. Podgson, in an indifferent—careless way. "But," he added, glancing at the elegant watch which he drew with affected negligence from his waistcoat pocket, "I've got an appointment at a quarter to eleven—and I must be punctual to the rendy-woo."

Mr. Styles assured the great man that he would not detain him a moment beyond the time named for the *rendez-vous*; and, spreading his plans and maps upon the table, the small speculator began to explain his objects and views to the large capitalist.

"Who's the engineer?" enquired the latter: then, looking at the corner of the plan, and perceiving the name, he cried, "Oh! Dummerley—eh? Well—he's a good man—a very good man! I was talking to Lord Noddleton the other day about him—Lord Noddleton and me are intimate friends, you know—very intimate—"

"His lordship has reason to be proud of your friendship, sir," observed Mr. Styles, adroitly availing himself of the opportunity to pay a compliment.

"Hem! well—Noddleton *does* seem grateful," said the Railway Lion, glancing complacently at one of his boots. "But, about this spec of your's, Mr. Styles? Shall you have a good list of Provisional Committee?"

"First-rate, sir—especially if you will condescend to head it," returned the small speculator with a bow to the great one.

"Well—we shall see!" exclaimed Mr. Podgson. "But first as to the probability of success? Let me just make a calculation or two—nothing is done without calculations; and I'm rather quick at figures. Now, your capital is £8,000,000 in 400,000 shares. Good! Deposit, £2 2s. per share. Good again! But about the expenses and receipts—the outlay and the incomes, on which we may reckon with certainty? Let me see—twice two's four—and twice four's eight—and nine times nine's eighty one—and eleven times eleven's a hundred and twenty one—that gives us five hundred thousand there—then there's two hundred thousand here—Well!" cried the great man, suddenly interrupting himself in the midst of calculations which, though they were as unintelligible as the Chinese language to Mr. Styles, it is to be hoped were a trifle more comprehensive to the gentleman who was making them in a musing, half-whispering tone, and counting mysteriously on his fingers at the same time:—"well!" he cried, suddenly desisting from the arithmetical process with the satisfied air of a man who had arrived at a conviction by means of the most subtle considerations:—"well, I do think it will succeed, Mr. Styles—and I—I—I—"

"Will condescend to become our Chairman, Mr. Podgson?" said the other, finishing the sentence which the Railway Lion's extreme modesty and sensitive bashfulness had left thus incomplete. "I am well aware, sir,—and the public are well aware likewise—that you have entered into the grand affairs of the Railway World with no interested motive,—that you never took a single share with the idea of making it a means of gain! No—sir—your views have been wholly and solely to benefit your fellow countrymen. Indeed, you yourself have proclaimed as much in your place in the House of Commons—and the civilised world echoes with the mighty truth! You are a benefactor, sir—a philanthropist—a patriot; and no sordid ideas ever influenced you! It is upon this ground, and on this ground only,—without even venturing to hint that there will be five thousand shares reserved for the Chairman and Provisional Committee-men, and that they are certain to rise to a high premium the moment they are issued,—without daring to mention such a thing in *your* presence, sir—but relying solely on your known readiness to countenance every fair—legitimate—and honourable undertaking which promises to benefit our fellow-men and produce fifty per cent. profits,—'tis upon these grounds, Mr. Podgson, that I solicit you to become the Chairman of the Grand British Longitudinal Railway!"

Mr. Styles narrowly watched the effect which this magniloquent oration produced upon the Railway Lion; and as he beheld the fat, ignoble, vulgar countenance of that stupendous animal slowly expanding with satisfaction, he knew that he was as sure of nailing Mr. Podgson for a Chairman: as he was sure of seeing Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Frank Curtis in the afternoon at three o'clock to partake of chops and sherry at Crosby Hall Chambers.

Nor was Mr. Bubbleton Styles mistaken. In as dignified a manner as it was in his nature to assume, and in as good English as it was in his power to employ, the great Mr. Podgson gave his assent to the proposition; and Mr. Styles was already in the midst of a set speech of thanks, when a pompous-looking livery-servant entered the room.

"Well, Thomas—what now?" demanded Mr. Podg-

"Please, sir," answered the domestic, whose countenance denoted offended dignity and wounded pride, "there's a troublesome gentleman down below who says he must and will have a hinterview with you, sir."

"Must and will!" ejaculated the Railway Lion, sinking back in his chair with an amazement which could not have been greater had some one rushed in to tell him that the Chinese had invaded England and made a Mandarin Lord Mayor of London.

"Yes, sir—must and will!" groaned the horrified domestic.

"Well—I never heard such impudence in my life!" exclaimed Mr. Bubbleton Styles, affecting the deepest indignation—a little piece of hypocrisy which completely won the Railway Lion's heart.

"And does this *person*—for you was wrong to call him a *gentleman*, John," said Mr. Podgson, somewhat recovering from his stupefaction,—"*does this person, who must and will see me—me, John—me, Mr. Styles,—does this person, I say, give his name or business?*"

"Please, sir, he gave me his card," returned the flunkey; "and here it be."

The high and mighty Railway Lion took the pasteboard between the tips of his thumb and forefinger; and having glanced at it, he tossed it with sublime scorn into a waste-paper basket, exclaiming in his rough, disagreeable voice, "Mr. Clarence Villiers—eh? Well—I suppose I'd better see him. Do n't move, Mr. Styles: you shall just see how I'll serve the insolent fellow that *must* and *will* have an interview with *me*!"

The domestic retreated without turning his back upon his master,—or, in other words, stepped backwards to the door, as if he were quitting the presence of Royalty; and Mr. Styles again vented his well-affected indignation and surprise that "people should be so bold and inconsiderate as to obtrude themselves into the presence of Mr. Podgson in such a manner."

"Bold and inconsiderate!" repeated the Railway Lion. "It is owdacious and intolerable."

"Shameful!" cried Mr. Styles.

"Perfectly insupportable!" vociferated Mr. Podgson.

"Monstrous in the extreme!" exclaimed Mr. Bubbleton Styles, actually working himself up into a passion.

"But I'll put a stop to it!" continued the Railway Lion, dealing a tremendous blow with his clenched fist upon the table: "I'll bring in a Bill next Session, Mr. Styles, to protect public men from insolent intrusion!"

"It will serve the scoundrels quite right, my dear sir," responded the small speculator, approvingly.

"By Gad! I'll pay the reskels off for it!" exclaimed the mighty man, who could command hundreds of thousands of pounds, but not the minutest fraction of his temper.

The door now opened again; and the pompous domestic, whose countenance was expressive of deep indignation, ushered in the reader's old friend—Mr. Clarence Villiers,—now a fine, handsome man, in the prime of life.

"Well, sir—and what do you want?" demanded Mr. Podgson, with all the overbearing insolence of a contemptible *parvenu*.

"In the first place, sir," replied Clarence, speaking in a firm but gentlemanly tone, and glancing towards the servant who lingered near the door, "I must take the liberty of advising you to recommend your lacqueys

to treat at least with respect, if not with courtesy, those persons whom business may bring to your house; for I can assure you that it required no ordinary forbearance on my part to restrain my hand from laying this cane across his shoulders."

"What, sir—you dare, sir——" stammered Mr. Podgson, his vast, ignoble countenance becoming the colour of scarlet.

"I dare chastise any one who is insolent to me, be he who or what he may, sir," answered Villiers, in a very significant way, and in so determined a tone, too, that the pompous domestic evaporated and the Railway Lion was struck speechless with amazement—for he felt as if he were literally bearded in his den! "Being myself a gentleman by birth and education, and I hope in manners and conduct, I am accustomed to treat my equals with courtesy and my inferiors with kindness; and I will tolerate insult from neither. But enough of that subject, Mr. Podgson," continued Villiers: "the object of my visit is soon explained. For many years I have enjoyed a confidential situation in the service of the Earl of Ellingham——"

"Oh! I really beg your pardon, Mr. Villiers!" exclaimed the Railway Lion, with a start as if the piles of a voltaic battery had suddenly been applied to his unwieldy carcase. "I wasn't aware that you knew Lord Ellingham—or else——But pray take a chair, Mr. Villiers."

"Thank you, sir—I would rather stand," answered Clarence, in a cold—almost contemptuous tone; for he saw full well that this sudden politeness was not paid to himself, but to his connexion with aristocracy. "Yesterday afternoon, Mr. Podgson, I returned from the country by the Western Provinces Railway; and I was most anxious to reach London at the usual hour for the arrival of that particular train, inasmuch as the business which I had in hand for my noble employer was urgent and pressing. Conceive, then, my annoyance when the train stopped for three quarters of an hour at a midway station—and without any substantial reason. I remonstrated with the persons on duty at that station: I even alighted, and saw the clerk. Several other gentlemen, whose time was likewise precious, joined me in my endeavours to prevent farther delay,—but all in vain! And the excuse was—that the train had to wait for a basket of fruit for Mrs. Podgson, the lady of the Chairman of the Company! Now, sir, with all possible respect for the fair sex, I submit to you that it is too bad——"

"And pray, sir," interrupted the mighty Railway Lion, flying into a furious passion, "why should not my wife receive her fruit in time? By Gad! sir—the train should have waited an hour for it, had it been necessary; and it would have been as much as the situations of the guard and engineer were worth to have continued the journey without that basket!"

"Then you mean me to understand, sir," said Villiers, in a calm and gentlemanly tone which contrasted strongly with the insolent, overbearing manner of the purse-proud vulgarian-upstart,—“you mean me to understand that you approve of the conduct of your underlings in delaying a train containing upwards of a hundred persons, to most of whom time was precious, for the sake of a basket of fruit!"

"Approve of it!" cried the Railway Lion, astonished that any doubt should exist upon the point: "why—I ordered it! sir!"

"Then all I can say in comment upon such improper conduct is—that if the Government and the Legislature have permitted Companies to grasp these

tremendous monopolies in order to use them as instruments of private convenience, without the slightest regard to the time or feelings of the public,—then, I for one," continued Clarence Villiers emphatically, "protest against so atrocious a despotism; and I begin to be ashamed of my own country, when I find it becoming the scene of a petty tyranny that would raise an outcry even in Russia or Austria."

"Oh! ho! the shoe pinches there—does it," cried Mr. Podgson, in the vulgar triumph effected by wealth over the popular interests. "I tell you what, sir—and I shall not attempt to disguise the matter:—we monopolists, as you call us, have got the railways in our own hands—and we mean to keep 'em—aye, and to do with 'em just as we like! Do you know how many hundred miles of railway I've got under my control? Ask the first person you happen to meet—and you'll be sure to find out. Well—do you think I won't use my rights and privileges,—I may almost say prerogatives—eh, Mr. Styles?"

"Oh! decidedly, my dear sir," exclaimed that gentleman, approvingly.

"Well," resumed the Railway Lion,—“do you think I won't use my prerogatives as I choose and fancy? If Mrs. Podgson wants even so trifling a thing as a new-laid egg from any particular station, the train shall wait for it. Talk to me about people's time—what the devil do I care for it? People must put up with things as they find 'em. They can't help themselves: we've knocked all the coaches off the roads—and you have no alternative but to go with us. But perhaps, when a train is late at starting, or when it is kept as it was yesterday, some of you knowing gentlemen will be after taking a post-chaise—at the Company's expense? I'd just advise you to do it! You'd have to sue us for the amount—and we'd ruin you in return. To recover five guineas you should have to pay as many hundreds in law costs. Why, sir—it is perfect madness to think of fighting great Public Companies;—and we'll let the people know it too."

Having arrived at this liberal and enlightened determination, the Railway Lion ceased through sheer exhaustion,—the volubility of passionate declamation not suiting his guttural voice.

"Although, sir, I obtain at your hands no satisfaction for the infamous delay to which the train was subjected yesterday," said Mr. Villiers, who had listened with calm and gentlemanly attention to the furious mouthings of the upstart,—“I am nevertheless pleased that I should have taken the trouble to call upon you in reference to the matter. I have learnt a lesson which I had not expected. I find that the sudden acquisition of wealth is calculated to set a man who rises from the People, against the People; and that monopoly is a more tremendous engine of oppression in the hands of narrow-minded and self-sufficient persons than even its greatest haters could have conceived. I do not envy you your riches, sir—nor your sovereign sway over many miles of railroad—no, nor even the title with which a fulsome and contemptible flattery has invested you:—for the poorest mechanic who does his duty towards his fellow-creatures, is a worthier and more estimable being than you."

With these words—uttered not savagely, but in a tone of firm and measured reproach—Clarence Villiers retired from the presence of the Railway Lion, who appeared for the moment to have had "a calf's skin" thrown about "his recreant limbs," so astounded and amazed was he at the language which his visitor had dared to address to him.



"This is the most atrocious proceeding I ever knew in the whole course of my life!" at length exclaimed Mr. Bubbleton Styles, who in reality had been much amused by the scene.

"I suppose that the riff-raff—as I always call the People—will be telling us next that railways are public property!" cried Mr. Podgson: "but we'll show 'em the difference—eh, Mr. Styles?—won't we, Mr. Styles?"

And the Railway Lion condescendingly thrust his fingers in a jocular way into the small speculator's ribs;—and then the great man and the little man had a hearty laugh together—that of the former being in the boisterous "ho! ho! ho!" style, and that of the latter in the more respectful and submissive "he! he! he!" fashion.

Having got upon this very comfortable and pleasant understanding together, Mr. Podgson and Mr. Styles chatted for about a quarter of an hour respecting the new railway scheme: and the latter took his departure, highly delighted with the reception he had experienced and the success of his visit.

Punctually as the clock struck three that afternoon, did Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Curtis present themselves at the office in Crosby Hall Chambers:

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and as the third stroke was proclaimed by the churches in the neighbourhood, they entered the speculator's private room, where that gentleman was seated at the table with his watch in his hand.

"Good!" exclaimed Mr. Styles, returning the watch to his pocket: "this is business-like—and I am well pleased. The chops, you perceive, are smoking hot—the sherry, I know, is first-rate."

Thus speaking, he did the honours of the table; and the two guests did honour to the meal. The chops speedily disappeared—so did a bottle of wine; and a second was already opened before a word had been uttered on business matters.

"Now, gentlemen," at length cried Mr. Styles; "I will give you a toast. Here's the health of our Chairman—the Railway Lion!"

"No! you don't mean to say——" ejaculated Mr. Curtis.

"Hould your tongue, Frank—and let Mistner Styles say whatever he chooses!" exclaimed the captain. "Drink the toast, man—and that's all about it!"

"I can assure you, gentlemen," continued the promoter of the new concern, "that I have fulfilled the promise which I made you yesterday. Podgson is our's!"

"Hooray!" vociferated Frank Curtis.

"Hur-rah-ah!" thundered Captain O'Blunderbuss.

"It is indeed a subject for gratulation," said Mr. Styles. "The next point I wish to speak to you about is the prospectus, a proof of which I have received from the printer. It would have been all ready for issue by this time, only my interview with the Railway Lion was prolonged far beyond the hour at which I had expected to be back in the City again;—and you may be sure that I was in no hurry when engaged with him," added Mr. Bubbleton Styles, smiling significantly. "Here, you see," he continued, displaying the proof of the flaming prospectus which he had drawn up,—“here is the glorious document. It is sufficient to set the very Thames on fire. Never were such magnificent promises—never such brilliant hopes held out! And look—thirty-two names of the most eminent Aldermen, merchants, Common Councilmen, and gentlemen——”

"Why—half of them have got F.R.S. to the end of their names!" ejaculated Frank Curtis: "what the deuce does that mean? And, by Jove!" he cried, now completely beside himself with astonishment,—this is strange! Here's the 'Secretary, Francis Curtis, Esq., F.R.S., M.A., M.S.L.S., &c. &c.' My dear friend Styles——"

"Patience—patience, Frank," said that gentleman, with bland complacency. "Those initials stand for various honorary distinctions which give respectability to the name. For instance, you are represented as being a *Fellow of the Royal Society*, a *Master of Arts*, and a *Member of Several Learned Societies*. God bless you, my dear fellow! even the very *et ceteras* have their weight in a Railway Prospectus."

"But I am nothing of all that you describe!" ejaculated Frank Curtis, surveying Mr. Styles with an expression of amazement that was quite ludicrous.

"I am well aware of that," answered the City gentleman, coolly: "neither are half the Aldermen or Common-Councilmen F.R.S.'s or any thing else—unless it is A.S.S.'s. But no Railway scheme can be got up without this kind of *gammon*—for that is precisely the word; and an Alderman who would send a poor devil to the treadmill for obtaining goods under false pretences if he only represented himself as Jones instead of Noakes, will himself assume any honorary distinction that is calculated to gull the public. Look at Alderman Higgs Higgs, for example's sake! Glance over the list of different Railway schemes—and amongst the Provisional Committee-men belonging to each you will see '*Higgs Higgs, Esq., Alderman, F.R.S., &c. &c.*' Even that consummate ass, Alderman Sun, has dubbed himself in a similar fashion;—and therefore I see no reason why Frank Curtis, Esq., or Captain Gorman O'Blunderbuss, should not be an F.R.S. likewise."

This explanation was highly satisfactory to the two gentlemen last mentioned; and on the strength of it they drank bumpers to the success of the projected enterprise.

"I have duly registered the Company," observed Mr. Styles; "and I have had an interview with Dummerley, the Engineer, this afternoon! Oh! I can assure you that I have not been idle. Dummerley is ready to swear that he has surveyed the whole line from the south of England to the north of Scotland——"

"But how is that possible?" demanded Frank, again lost in astonishment: for, crafty and cunning as he was in petty trickeries, he was altogether bewildered in

the mazes of colossal swindles. "You only thought of the plan a few days ago—and Dummerley would not have even had time to travel the whole distance there and back post haste—much less to survey it leisurely."

"You are quite green in these matters, Frank," observed Mr. Styles.

"Green!" ejaculated Captain O'Blunderbuss: "be Jasus! the Emerald Isle itself isn't so green as my friend Frank in cer-r-r-tain respects. But it's a rather enlightening him ye are, Mither Sthyles—and he'll be all the better for the taching."

"Dummerley is a regular good fellow, I can assure you," resumed the promoter. "You will be the Engineer," said I to him this afternoon: *I told Podgson that you would.*—'Most certainly,' he replied.—'And in case the Bill should be opposed in Committee, you will be ready to swear that you particularly surveyed the part of the line relative to which objections may be raised?'—'Oh! of course,' was his answer.—'And you will also swear that your plans are perfectly correct?'—'As a matter of course,' he again replied.—'Well, then,' said I, '*here's a five pound note for you; and now fall to work as hard as you can to get all the plans up in such a business-like way that they may look legitimate.*'—Dummerley accordingly took himself off as happy as a prince; and thus every thing goes on completely in our favour. But it is now three minutes to five; and at five precisely I step into the Hackney omnibus at the Flower-Pot," added Mr. Styles, looking at his watch for the hundredth time during the last quarter of an hour.

Frank Curtis and Captain O'Blunderbuss took the hint and their departure; and the promoter of a scheme for raising millions treated himself with a six-penny ride in an omnibus as far as Cambridge Heath Gate, in which suburban quarter this great man resided in a six-roomed house, including the kitchens.

CHAPTER CXXVI.

ELUCIDATIONS.

At the conclusion of the hundred and twenty-fourth chapter we asked whether Charles Hatfield would succeed in crushing the sentiments of curiosity that had been awakened within him?

Alas! no—it was impossible!

His better feelings, aroused by the startling remembrance of the assurances he had respectively given his father and mother, had for a few hours triumphed over that insatiable longing to penetrate into the mysteries of the past:—but when he again found himself alone in his chamber, in the silence of night, he could not subdue the thoughts which forced themselves upon him, and which were all connected with those mysteries.

Thus was it that we again find him pacing his chamber while others slept,—pacing up and down in an agitated and excited manner, and maintaining a desperate struggle within his own soul.

For the irresistible temptation which beset him, was to ponder once more and deeply on the incidents of his early days, and to endeavour to retrieve from the abysses of his memory any other recollections that might be slumbering there. For the sake of the pledge given to his mother—for the sake of the assurance made to his father, he strove,—yes—sincerely, ardently he strove—to vanquish that temptation: yet

he could not—human nature possessed not so grand a power:—he might have ruled his actions by his will—but his thoughts defied all controul.

Yielding, therefore, at length to their current, he was whirled along by the same eddying tide of reflections which had swept him through so considerable a portion of the preceding night;—and now the efforts of memory—by one of those superhuman strainings which, while they seem as if they must break the very fibres of the brain, also appear to evoke a sudden flash from the depth of some profound cerebral cell,—those powerful and painful efforts in a moment, as it were, established a connexion between the name of *Benjamin Bones* and the murder of *Tamar*!

Yes: Charles Hatfield suddenly became aware that the name and the incident were in some way associated:—and he necessarily supposed that, in his childhood, he had heard facts mentioned which had created that impression at the time, but the nature of which he could not now for the life of him recall to memory. This impression was probably vague even at the period when it was engendered; because Charles recollected full well that the utmost caution was adopted by those around him not to discourse upon the particulars of the foul murder in his presence, nor even to respond otherwise than evasively to the questions he put,—he being a mere child at the time.

As the young gentleman paced up and down, his mind labouring with the new reminiscence which had arisen within, it suddenly struck him that there were means of informing himself of all and every detail of that murder, whereof he at present entertained only a vague and general impression of its atrocity. His long absence on the continent had prevented him from ever, even accidentally, falling in with an English book of criminal annals, or a file of English newspapers, to which he might have referred, had the thought struck him so to do. But now what was to restrain him from making those searches which would throw every light on an occurrence of such fearful interest?

Scarcely was this idea conceived, when the means of instantaneously carrying it into execution suggested itself. For Charles Hatfield remembered that in the well-stored library of the mansion he had observed a complete set of the *Annual Register*, from the very origin of that useful work until the most recent date of its publication!

And now he trembled from head to foot—he literally gasped for breath, at the thought of being enabled to tear away the veil of mystery from at least one incident which was so materially connected with his childhood: for *Tamar* had been as a mother to him during the few months that he was in her care!

There was in his soul a deep and yet undefined presentiment that he stood on the threshold of strange discoveries—that important revelations were about to be made to him;—and, without being superstitious, he lent to the influence of this solemn but dim foreboding—this awe-inspiring but vague prescience.

Taking the lamp in his hand, he stole gently from his chamber—descended the wide and handsome staircase—traversed a long corridor, in the niches of which stood beautiful specimens of sculpture—and entered the spacious library.

On each side of the door was a marble statue as large as life; and the young man started—but only for a moment—as the white and motionless effigies stood out suddenly as if it were from the deep darkness which the lamp illumined. It was not that he had forgotten such statues were there—nor that he was

positively frightened at their appearance:—but his soul was influenced by one of those presentiments which are of themselves superstitious in character—and moreover he was on the point of seeking information relative to the details of a foul and horrible murder.

Instantly recovering himself, and blushing at his fears, he advanced into the library, closing the door carefully behind him: then, approaching a particular range of shelves, he reached down the *Annual Register* for the year 1827.

In less than a minute he was seated at the table, with the book opened at the proper place before him;—and greedily—Oh! how greedily he plunged as it were into its contents.

But—great heavens!—why starts he thus? What discovery has he made?—what revelation has been afforded him?

He learns, with a frightful sinking of the heart, that Rainford was a highwayman—that he had been executed at Horsemonger Lane Gaol—that he had been resuscitated by some means or another with which the writer was unacquainted—that he had reappeared in London in the disguise of a Blackamoor—and that he had received the royal pardon for all his crimes. These details were incidentally given in the course of the narrative of the foul murder of *Tamar*, who was represented to have been Rainford's wife;—and now also Charles Hatfield discovered how terrific was the connexion between the name of Benjamin Bones and the assassination of that ill-fated daughter of Israel. Yes—and he perceived, too, that *Benjamin Bones* and *Old Death* were one and the same individual;—and he shuddered from head to foot as he perused—nay, almost rushed through the details of the crime which had been committed nineteen years previously in the subterranean cells belonging to a house in Red Lion Street, Clerkenwell!

But Charles Hatfield is not satisfied with what he has already devoured—for we can scarcely use the word *read*:—his curiosity to know more has become insatiable;—and guided by the hints and the observations occurring in the narrative of the murder, he refers to an earlier page in that volume, in order to obtain a full and complete insight into the trial and condemnation of Rainford—that Rainford whom he had loved so well!

The whole particulars were given in detail and with accuracy,—the robbery of Sir Christopher Blunt—the capture of Rainford by Dykes and his myrmidons in Lock's Fields—the trial—the condemnation—and the execution!

Charles read—read on with horrified feelings which often threatened to get the better of him;—but there was one point in the evidence which rivetted his attention. Dykes, the officer, in explaining the mode in which the highwayman had been taken into custody, used these words:—“*When I and my people gained admittance into the house in Brandon Street, the prisoner was in bed with his mistress, a Jewess.*”

“Then,” thought Charles Hatfield immediately, “*Tamar was not his wife!* Ah! that is clear enough—although the narrative of the murder would imply otherwise. But the only inference that can be drawn from this discrepancy, is that the reporter of the assassination was delicately and judiciously sparing of the feelings of the Medina family—whereas, in the former case, it was absolutely necessary to record the evidence just as it was given. Poor *Tamar*!—no wonder that thy name is never mentioned now by those who once knew thee—no wonder that even thy

very sister, the Countess of Ellingham, seems to have forgotten thee!"

Thus, Charles Hatfield suddenly adopted the belief that Tamar was not Rainford's wife. Neither, indeed, was she at the time when Rainford was arrested by Mr. Dykes; and it never struck the young man that the matrimonial ceremony might have been performed between the period of Rainford's resuscitation and the murder of the Jewish lady. For when the nuptial blessing was performed in Paris, Charles—being then a mere boy—was not present at the proceedings which took place as privately as possible in the British Ambassador's Chapel. As for his suspicion that the Countess of Ellingham was ashamed to breathe the name of Tamar,—Oh! the reader may judge how erroneous was that belief! In her heart of hearts did the generous Esther treasure the image of that dearly-beloved sister;—and if neither herself nor her noble husband ever breathed her name, it was through kind feelings towards Mr. Hatfield and motives of delicacy in respect to Georgiana. But Charles, being as yet ignorant that his father and Rainford were one and the same person, could not possibly suspect the necessity for the exercise of such kind feelings on the one hand or such delicacy on the other.

"And thus," murmured Charles to himself, as he closed the book which had made such marvellous and horrifying revelations,—“and thus Thomas Rainford was a highwayman! The good—kind-hearted—generous man who loved me, was a felon—a criminal: he passed through the hands of the public executioner! Oh! my God—what dreadful things have I this night learnt!” he exclaimed aloud, pressing his hand to his forehead. “But how came this Thomas Rainford to have the care of me?—how was it that my parents could have left me so long in his hands—or at his disposal? Oh! no wonder—no wonder that Mr. de Medina and Esther should have charged me, when first they left me at school, never to mention the name of Rainford! And now how many gaps in the earliest portion of my reminiscences are filled up,—that absence of Mr. Rainford for several weeks, during which period I pined after him—that constant weeping of Tamar—then the removal to Mr. de Medina's house, and the sudden revival of joy which Tamar experienced there. But—a highwayman—a felon—a criminal! Oh! what awful mysteries envelop all this matter still! For the Earl of Ellingham was intimate with Rainford—and it was said, I remember, that at Mr. de Medina's death he left to this same Rainford a large fortune. A fortune to whom?—to the seducer of his daughter—to one who had passed through the hands of the public executioner! And Lord Ellingham was intimate with the man who seduced the sister of his intended wife;—and Esther was friendly likewise with him who ruined that sister. Gracious God! all this is most unaccountable—so unaccountable, that I am lost and bewildered! But most mysterious—ten thousand times the most mysterious of all these incidents, is that one grand fact to which I cannot but recur,—how could my parents have left me in the care of a highwayman! 'Tis true that he received the royal pardon: but that pardon—Ah! the *Register* says that it was procured through the interest of Lady Hatfield—that Dykes, an officer of justice, was present at the time when that lady announced—Just heavens! a light breaks in upon my soul—Oh! no—no—and yet that resemblance—May God have mercy upon me!”

And the young man, groaning bitterly—bitterly, in the anguish of his spirit, fell back in his chair—covering his face with his hands.

Yes—a light had indeed broken in upon him, elucidating a terrible mystery in a terrible manner! Lady Georgiana Hatfield had procured the royal pardon:—Lady Georgiana Hatfield must therefore have had strong reasons thus to exert herself in behalf of a convicted felon, who had passed through the hands of the hangman, but had been recalled to life and restored to the world in some wondrous manner. But of what nature were those potent reasons? Naturally did it strike Charles Hatfield that *love* must have been the cause;—and when he recollected the resemblance which existed between his own father and that Thomas Rainford who had once been his friend and protector, it flashed to his mind that he in whom Lady Hatfield had shown such tender interest—even to the compromising of her fair fame in the eyes of the world,—he for whom she had so far stepped aside from the precise course of female delicacy as to implore the royal pardon,—he it must be who was her husband!

Yes—yes: it was now as clear as the sun at noon-day:—Mr. Hatfield and Thomas Rainford were one and the same individual,—and he—Charles Hatfield—was the son of a highwayman who had been tried—convicted—and ushered through all the ignominious ordeal of the scaffold!

For several minutes the young man sat motionless—crushed, stupefied, astounded by the appalling truth which he had elicited from his fatal investigations into the past:—for several minutes it must have been a mere balancing of chances whether he should awake from that dreadful reverie to the light of reason once more, or suddenly start up a howling, hopeless maniac!

But this latter condition was not to be his frightful doom. By degrees—by very slow degrees, he recovered so much of his self-possession and composure as to be enabled to look his misfortune in the face, and even fall into additional reflections on the subject.

“Yes—Thomas Rainford and Mr. Hatfield are the same individual—and *he* is my father! It was but little more than nineteen years ago when the trial and the ordeal of the gallows took place—and I am twenty-five! Was my mother—was Lady Hatfield my father's wife at that time? In other words—am I legitimate? ‘*As God is my judge,*’ said my father yesterday, ‘*she has never been guilty of weakness or frailty.*’ Then what am I to believe? That my father and my mother were married privately in an honourable manner—and that I was the offspring of that lawful union;—then, that my father deserted my mother, and became enamoured of Tamar, whom he took as his mistress;—and, lastly, that after Tamar's death, my parents were reunited! This—this must be the truth—and therefore my father deceived me not when he so emphatically proclaimed my mother's virtue and my legitimacy. But—Oh! my God!—well might he have said that *the weightiest reasons had alone induced him and my mother to practise a deception towards myself and the world in respect to the degree of relationship in which I really stood with regard to them!* Yes—for the world perhaps dates the marriage of my parents only from the time when they were reunited a few years after Tamar's death:—and hence the necessity of calling me their *nephew!* I understand it all now—Oh! yes, I understand it all too

well! I am legitimate—but I am the son of a highwayman: my God! how bitterly—bitterly is my curiosity punished this night!”

And now the young man sobbed as if his heart would break.

Whither had flown his dreams of ambition?—where now were his hopes of emulating the career of His Royal Highness, the Prince of Montoni?

“The son of a highwayman!”—these were the words that fell ten times in a minute from his tongue:—that was the idea which now sat, dominant and all-absorbing, but like a leaden weight, upon his soul.

And did he loathe his father?—did he curse the author of his being?

No—no: a thousand times, no! Deep—profound—immeasurable was the pity which he entertained for his sire;—and if he loathed any thing, it was his own existence—if he cursed aught, it was his own being!

For, oh! terrible indeed was it for that fine young man, of lofty principles, generous nature, and soaring aspiration;—terrible was it for him to receive a blow so sudden—a shock so rude—a rebuff so awful!

Better—better far had it been for him to remain in ignorance of his parentage,—still to have looked on Mr. Hatfield as his uncle, and on Lady Georgiana as his aunt,—rather than have learnt a secret which only prompted him to fathom collateral mysteries and clear up associated doubts! For the result of those researches was the elucidation which had flashed on him with almost lightning effect,—blasting—scorching—scorching!

“Accursed book!” he suddenly exclaimed, hurling the *Annual Register* across the apartment, as if the volume were a living thing, and endowed with human feelings, so as to be susceptible of the venting influence of his rage.

But in the next moment he reflected that no trace of an untimely or mysterious visit to that library must remain,—that none must suspect his prying or his researches: for not for worlds—no, not for worlds—would he have his father or mother know that he had made the discoveries which characterised this memorable night! He accordingly rose from his seat—raised the volume from the floor—and turned to the book-case to replace it.

This act, so simple in itself, was destined to lead to a circumstance thenceforth influencing the entire destiny of Charles Hatfield: for as he thrust the volume back into the place on the shelf whence he had taken it, he heard a sharp abrupt sound, like the click of a lock.

He was in that humour when every incident, however trivial, was calculated to assume an importance in his imagination; and, standing on a chair, he proceeded to examine the wainscoting at the back of the shelves—for which purpose he removed several of the books. To his surprise, he observed a small aperture formed by the opening of a sliding panel, and which revealed a recess in the wall of about a foot square,—the violence with which, in his excitement, he had thrust the book on the shelf, having acted on the secret spring whereby the panel was fastened.

Under ordinary circumstances, Charles Hatfield would have immediately closed the recess, in which he beheld a small leathern case and a packet of letters,—in the same way as he would have abstained from reading a manuscript lying on a desk or evidently left about through inadvertence. But, on the present occasion, he was not his own master:—his honourable feelings were triumphed over by emotions of the most

painful nature;—and it was impossible, in this state of mind, that he should avoid catching at any circumstance savouring of mystery,—every such circumstance apparently linking itself with his own concerns.

Thus, obedient to an impulse which he could not controul, he seized the leathern case and the documents as if they were a glorious prize; and, returning to his seat, proceeded to examine them.

The leathern case contained a roll of letters, and other documents tied round with a piece of riband so faded that it was impossible to determine what its colour might have originally been. The writing in the papers was, however, still completely legible—the leathern case, and the total absence of damp in the little recess, having preserved them for a period of half a century!

Wrapped round the roll of papers in the case, was a letter, addressed to the Earl of Ellingham; and it instantaneously struck Charles that it was in the handwriting of his father—Mr. Hatfield! By the comparative darkness of the ink, it was of a far more recent period than the documents which it accompanied;—but the precise time when it was written did not immediately appear, no date being attached to it.

Without pausing to reflect upon the impropriety of violating the sanctity of correspondence concealed with so much precaution in a secret recess,—but carried away by the influence of those feelings which we have above attempted to describe,—Charles Hatfield devoured the contents of this letter; and though they are already familiar to the reader, yet for the purposes of our narrative we quote them again:—

“I have sent you the papers, my dear brother—for so I shall make bold to call you still,—to convince you that I did not forge an idle tale when we met last. Whatever your motive for abandoning me in my last hours may be, I entertain no ill feeling towards you: on the contrary, I hope that God may prosper you, and give you long life to enjoy that title and fortune which in so short a time will be beyond the possibility of dispute.

“I had promised to leave behind me a written narrative of my chequered and eventful history for your perusal: but—need I explain wherefore I have not fulfilled this promise?”

“T. H.”

“His brother—his dear brother!” gasped Charles Hatfield, as the letter dropped from his hands; but his eyes remained intently fixed upon it: “his brother!” he repeated. “My God! then am I the nephew of the Earl of Ellingham?—am I the cousin of Lady Frances, whom I already love so well? But—gracious heavens!” he ejaculated, as another and still more thrilling idea flashed to his mind: “if Mr. Hatfield be indeed the brother of the Earl of Ellingham—as he assuredly is,—then is he the elder brother! And if the elder brother, he himself should be the bearer of the title—and I—I should be a Viscount! But—ah! perhaps my father is the illegitimate offspring of the late Earl—and that this is the reason wherefore the family honours and estates have devolved upon the younger brother! And yet—what mean these words?—‘give you long life to enjoy that title and fortune which in so short a time will be beyond the possibility of dispute!’ Oh! here again is some dreadful mystery: just heavens! what a fated—doomed family is ours! Doubt—uncertainty—secrecy characterise all its history:—at least the experience of the last two days would lead me so to believe!”

At this moment the young man’s eyes fell upon the roll of paper which he had taken from the leathern case: and with feverish impatience—yet still with

care, inasmuch as the documents were as fragile with old age as tinder—he proceeded to examine them.

And, oh! how deep—how intense suddenly became the interest with which he now perused the diary and the letters of the unfortunate Octavia Manners! His excitement was stilled—his impatience was subdued: a deadly pallor succeeded the hectic flush upon his cheeks;—still and motionless sate he, his eyes devouring the contents of those important papers!

The frightful treachery of Old Death towards his half-sister, the beautiful but ill-fated Octavia, was revealed step by step;—but there was likewise an elucidation which touched a chord that thrilled to the inmost recesses of young Hatfield's heart,—and this was the fact that Octavia was wedded by the late Earl of Ellingham previous to the birth of the child! Yes—there was the marriage-certificate: there, too, was the certificate of the child's baptism;—and that child was therefore, at its very birth, the heir to the proud title and the entailed estates of a mighty Earldom!

Here let us pause for a few moments to afford an explanation which now becomes necessary.

If the reader will refer to the forty-seventh chapter of this narrative, he will find recorded so much of the history of poor Octavia Manners as Arthur himself was acquainted with. In relating that history to Lady Georgiana Hatfield, Arthur had stated that Octavia fled away from her vile half-brother's house the very day after her disgrace was consummated. "For several months no trace was discovered of her: it was feared she had committed suicide." During that interval the first Countess of Ellingham died. At length the Earl (Arthur's father) accidentally discovered that Octavia was living, and that she was in a way to become a mother. "He hastened to the miserable garret which she occupied, and found her in the most abject state of poverty—endeavouring to earn a subsistence with her needle." All his affection for her revived, with renewed vigour; and his heart smote him with remorse for the appalling treachery which he had perpetrated towards her. He saw her ruined in health, character, and spirits,—ruined by him,—still surpassingly beautiful, but only a wreck of what she once was;—he saw all this—and he was horror-struck at the effects of his crime! He threw himself on his knees—he offered her every possible reparation which it was in his power to make;—and then—for the sake of the child which she bore in her bosom—she said, "If you would prove your contrition, my lord—if you would impart one single gleam of hope, however faint, to my soul—you will make me your wife! It is not for myself that I demand this boon at your hands,—for a boon it becomes when the violater espouses the violated,—yes, a boon in the estimation of the world, though only an act of justice in the eyes of God! No—it is not for myself 'tis for our child! Think not that I—the sister of the marine-store dealer—shall ever assume the name or adopt the rank of Countess of Ellingham! Let our union be secret—only let it take place at once, so that our child may be legitimate!" Thus spoke Octavia Manners on that occasion; and the Earl of Ellingham, her violater, consented to all that she asked. They were married with so much privacy that even Miranda—the faithful gipsy girl who had formed so strong an attachment to Octavia—remained ignorant of the important occurrence. But the very next day Octavia fled! No affection had she for the noble who had ruined her—who had been the cause of her severance from the

object of her first and only love: she had only asked him to marry her for the sake of the honour of their child's parentage—and, the ceremony being performed, she withdrew herself into the strictest solitude and obscurity, to brood over her woes and sufferings in secret!

Such was the substance of that portion of Octavia's own diary which revealed to Charles Hatfield the fact that the injured girl was indeed the Countess of Ellingham when her child was born! And that child's career could be traced—yes, satisfactorily traced—step by step, by means of the papers which the young man had taken from the leathern case, and the packet of letters that he had likewise found in the recess;—and it was evident, beyond the least possibility of doubt, that the individual whom the world had known as Thomas Rainford, and whom it now knew as Mr. Hatfield,—it was clear, even beyond the remotest ground of suspicion to the contrary, that this individual was the rightful Earl of Ellingham!

Recollect, too, reader, that Charles Hatfield had become firmly impressed with the belief that he was the *legitimate* offspring of his parents;—and now, therefore, conceive the wild enthusiasm of his delight, when he came to the conclusion that he was in reality a Viscount by present rank, and had an Earldom in the perspective!

Forgotten was the fact that had ere now stunned and stupefied him,—the fact that his father was the notorious highwayman, Thomas Rainford:—he thought of that no more, in the delirium of his rapture at the idea of having a noble title within his reach. But had he not, on the previous day, assured Lady Frances Ellingham that he envied only the greatness which had made itself, and not that which was obtained by the accident of birth? Yes: and at the time he conscientiously believed that he spoke his own thoughts correctly. Now, however, that the temptation appeared to be within his reach, it possessed charms and attractions of irresistible power!

Recalling to mind the sounding titles of the object of his admiration and heroic worship, he began to fancy that *the Right Honourable the Earl of Ellingham* was not comparatively so very insignificant, even when uttered after the swelling appellations of *His Royal Highness Field Marshal the Prince of Montoni, Captain-General of the Castile-Catalan Army, and Heir-apparent to the Grand Ducal Throne.*

Suddenly, as it were, we behold the young man, whose sentiments were so noble and generous while he deemed himself to be a mere civilian having every exertion to make in order to rise to eminence,—suddenly we behold him seized with an insatiable ambition, now that a coronet appeared to be actually within his reach.

But did he contemplate the immediate adoption of measures to force his father to wrest the title and estates of the Earldom from Arthur? We know not all that passed through the mind of Charles Hatfield on this fatal night:—we can, however, aver that having fully perused the valuable documents which had made to him such important revelations, he did not restore them to the secret recess where he had found them, but secured them about his own person.

Previously to quitting the library, he closed the sliding panel, and replaced the *Annual Register* in such a manner that the shelf did not appear to have been disturbed.

The west-end clocks were striking three, and the light of a July morning was streaming through the

windows of the mansion, when Charles Hatfield retired to his own chamber. His first care was to consign to his writing-desk the documents and letters which he now considered to be the arbiters of his destiny; and, this being performed, he sought his couch.

But slumber would not visit his eyes:—myriads of conflicting ideas were in his brain. He felt that he had to play the hypocrite—to keep a bridle on his tongue—to controul every look, and measure every word, until the time should come for proclaiming all he knew. For the present he would not distress his parents by allowing them even to suspect that the things which they considered to be such profound secrets, were no longer so to him. No:—he would endeavour to appear the same gay—frank—confiding—affectionate Charles Hatfield that he hitherto had been!

These were amongst the principal reflections which chased sleep from his pillow until long past four o'clock;—and when at length his heavy lids were weighed down through sheer exhaustion of the mental and physical energies, his slumber was agitated with wild and varying visions, and he awoke unrefreshed, and still suffering with the fatigue of his long vigil.

CHAPTER CXXVII

THE WANDERERS.

THE night on which Charles Hatfield made the important discoveries detailed in the preceding chapter, was marked by other events of a scarcely less interesting nature.

It was about eleven o'clock—the weather was intensely warm—and not a breath of air agitated the foliage on the way-side, as two females toiled slowly and painfully along the high road between Dartford and Shooter's Hill.

One was a hideous old harridan whose years could not have been less than sixty-two or sixty-three; and yet, though her form—once tall, symmetrical, and on a large scale—was bowed with age and sufferings, she still possessed considerable physical energy. The countenance was weather-beaten and tanned to such an extreme that, had she been dressed in male attire, no delicacy nor feminine cast of features would have betrayed her real sex: her short grizzled locks were confined by an old kerchief wound round her head in a gipsy fashion;—and her garb denoted the utmost penury and distress. Not only did she leave upon the mind the disagreeable impression of revolting ugliness;—but her look was sinister and repulsive. The wrinkles beneath her eyes and about her closely compressed lips, bespoke a ferocious and determined character,—a soul resolute and nerved to every evil purpose;—and the acute observer might also mark in that countenance traces of those stormy and impetuous passions which had influenced her earlier years.

Her companion was a young woman of about nineteen; and though she was dressed almost as wretchedly as the old harridan, yet how different was the form which those rags covered! For her figure, though full even to a maturity beyond her years, was exquisitely modelled,—a waist not ridiculously small, but still small enough to develop in all their voluptuous proportions the swelling hips and fine bust. Clothed in stockings covered with darns, and shod with large clumsy shoes, were limbs and feet that for

symmetry might have been envied by a queen;—and, as if anxious in the depths of her penury to preserve her charms as completely as possible, she wore an old pair of gloves upon her beautifully sculptured hands. Then her face, though sun-burnt was of a beauty which even an anchorite must have turned to admire,—yet a beauty of a bold and masculine style, and stamping her rather as a very handsome than as a very lovely woman. Her features were of the Roman cast,—the strong facial aquiline denoting a voluptuous and profoundly sensual disposition;—her fine large grey eyes looked boldly and wantonly from beneath dark brows majestically arched and almost meeting between the temples, and above which rose the high, straight, wide forehead, crowned with intelligence. Her hair was of a dark brown and singularly luxuriant, glossy, and silken;—and it was evident that not even the bitter miseries of poverty rendered her indifferent to the care which that glorious covering required to maintain its splendour unimpaired. Her mouth was small,—the upper lip thin—the lower one fuller, but not pouting;—her teeth, the least thing large, were nevertheless perfectly regular and of pearly whiteness;—and her chin was prominent, but well rounded. The general expression of her countenance was indicative of strong passions and fierce desires—great resolution of purpose—and something approaching even to a resolute sternness of purpose, amounting almost to implacability. She was not above the middle height; and her carriage was more commanding than graceful;—at the same time, it would have struck a beholder that were she attired in a befitting manner, her gait and gestures would have been characterised by nothing positively inelegant.

The reader will perceive that great, in many respects, was the contrast between the mother and daughter—for in such close relationship did the two females stand to each other: but in some points there was a marked resemblance. For instance, the countenances of both indicated strong passions and indomitable resolution;—both were totally devoid of all moral principle, though they could simulate the sanctity of anchorites to suit their purposes or serve their interests;—and both could be implacable enemies, while friendship was a mere name with them at which their lips would curl into a sneer.

In spite of her natural energies and the somewhat substantial remains of physical strength, the old woman dragged herself slowly and painfully along the road towards London; while her daughter exhibited scarcely less evident symptoms of fatigue—approaching almost to total exhaustion.

"Perdita," said the harridan, suddenly breaking a silence that had been of long duration,—"*Perdita*," she repeated, "we cannot reach London this night: it will be impossible,—I feel it will be impossible."

"Then we must lie down by the road-side and perish with hunger," answered the young woman, who bore, it seemed, the singular Christian name of *Perdita*.

We have above spoken of contrasts and resemblances in respect to these two females, who are destined to play no unimportant part in the forthcoming chapters of our narrative;—but we must pause to observe that it would be impossible to conceive a greater discrepancy in tones than that which marked the voices of mother and daughter.

The voice of the old woman was masculine—hoarse—disagreeable—and grating to the ear; and although she spoke the English language with the most grammatical punctuality, and there was nothing positively

vulgar in her manner of speech, yet the impression it seemed calculated to produce upon a stranger was singularly unpleasant. On the other hand, the whole sphere of harmony has known nothing more melodious than the voice of Perdita,—a voice which was capable of many modulations, each characterised by a charm peculiar to itself; for whether she were speaking in indignation—or in softness,—in outbursting passion—or in dogged ill-humour,—still were the tones of that voice metallic, rich, and flowing.

"The heartless wretches!" exclaimed the old woman, again breaking an interval of silence,—“to thrust us on shore at Deal with only a shilling in our pockets!”

"This is not the least hardship we have ever endured, mother," said Perdita, rather in a tone of remonstrance than consolation. "For my part, I have scarcely ever seen any thing but privation and misery—"

"You ungrateful wretch!" ejaculated the harridan, furiously. "When I had but a morsel of bread to give you, did I ever take a portion for myself! For you, Perdita," she continued, speaking in a milder and even more tender tone,—“for you I have gone through sufferings unknown and unheard of in this country,—for you have I toiled beneath the scorching South Australian sun of summer, and amidst the noisome damps of a South Australian winter! Yes—for years and years have I toiled on—toiled on, that your beauty might not be impaired by want or privation,—at least that you might endure as little want and privation as possible.”

"Well—well," cried the young woman, somewhat softened by her mother's words; "don't let us look back to the past. We are now in England—and you say that we are not many miles from London. Good! We will endeavour to sustain each other's courage and strength to reach the fine city where you hope to change our rags into silks and satins, and fill our empty pockets with gold."

"Yes—and you shall see whether I have deceived you, Perdita!" exclaimed the harridan, in a tone partaking of enthusiasm. "Nearly nineteen years have elapsed since I last saw the mighty metropolis; and, unless its people be much changed, there is a fortune to be made by an experienced woman and a beautiful girl, leagued together."

"And you are the experienced woman, mother?" said Perdita, actually seeking a compliment—for inordinate vanity was amongst her failings.

"Yes—and you are the beautiful girl—and you know it," returned the old harridan. "Being of accord as we are together, it is impossible that we can fail to accomplish our grand designs. Why was it that I implored you not to accept the offers of marriage which needy settlers made you in New South Wales? Because your charms can command thousands of pounds in London; whereas, in that frightful colony, all you could have hoped to gain was what is termed '*a comfortable position*.' And to one possessing your notions—your pride—your strong passions—your soaring disposition,—aye, and to one endowed with your loveliness too,—a mere *home* is not sufficient. You require luxuries—although you have never yet tasted them,—fine clothes—although you have never yet worn them,—a splendid equipage, although you have never yet known the use of one! It was for this that I brought you to England,—it was for this that I besought you to contract no marriage in the colony,—it was for this

that I conjured you to abstain from any connexion that might become permanent!"

"I am well aware of your motives, mother," said Perdita. "In a word," she added, with a strange mixture of pride and irony, "you considered my beauty to be more marketable in London than in New South Wales. And after all that you have told me of the English people and England's capital, I am inclined to believe that you have not misled me. But supposing that I contract some splendid marriage in London—that I find my way into the highest circles—and that I become the *belle* of the great city,—will there not be the constant risk—the ever imminent chance of falling in with the officers of some of those regiments which have returned from Sydney or Botany Bay—"

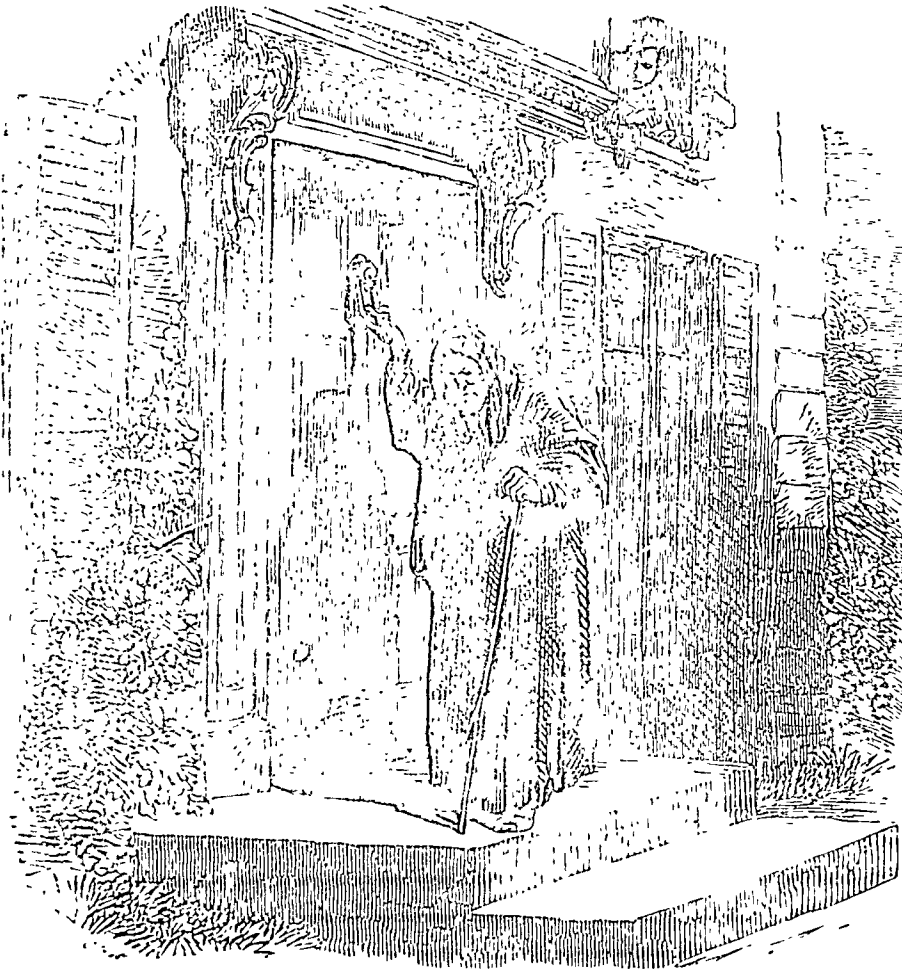
"I see now that you scarcely understand me—that we do not altogether comprehend each other!" interrupted the old woman, impatiently. "There is no need for you to count only on the chance of making a good match: 'tis indeed far more probable that you may ensnare some young gentleman of birth, family, and fortune,—or some old voluptuary of immense wealth,—and there is more to be gained as the mistress of one of these, than as a wife. Do not marry, Perdita—do not dream of marriage: remain independent—and the moment you have ruined one lover, you can take another. There—that is plain speaking; and now do you comprehend me?"

"Perfectly," answered the young woman: then, under the influence of the wanton thoughts which rushed to her imagination, she said, "Yes—I comprehend you, and I confess that your views now become more suitable to mine. I could not chain myself to one individual, with any hope of being faithful to him:—*love* is a passion which will never obtain over me that influence which it so often exercises over the weak, the simple-minded, or the infatuated."

"Be not too confident on that point, Perdita," said the old woman. "In Sydney and Botany Bay your amours were only the result of a warm temperament;—for carefully as I watched over you—"

"Now, mother, let us have no moral teachings from your lips!" exclaimed the young woman, in an imperious and authoritative tone; "for had you been so very immaculate yourself, I should never have beheld the light of day, neither would you have passed some eighteen or nineteen years of your life in a penal colony. And such a colony as it is! Why—let a pretty girl be hemmed in by all the precautions which a parent can imagine, circumstances must inevitably lead her astray in South Australia! And you,—you, who know all this so well,—can you wonder if I were seduced at the early age of thirteen, and if from that period until your pardon arrived and we embarked to return home, I have not failed to indulge my fancy without hesitation? On the one side I obeyed your instructions,—I accepted no offer of marriage, and lived with no man permanently as his mistress: but, on the other, I hesitated not to intrigue with the gayest and most dashing officers—"

"Enough! enough!" ejaculated the mother, who, bad as she herself was, felt a cold chill come over her at this open, audacious, and unblushing avowal of her daughter's depravity,—a depravity that was not however unknown, either in circumstances or extent, to the old woman. "Give me your arm, Perdita—assist me to mount this hill,—for I am ready to drop. There! you are a good girl! Ah! Perdita—I was once young and beautiful as you are now,—well-formed too, and



element in carriage! I was a lady in every sense of the word—as far as outward appearance and manners went. But now—oh! how altered I am! My toothless mouth was once filled with pearls as white as your's—my bust was as voluptuous and as firm—my figure was as upright—my feet and ankles as delicate—and my step as light! Ah! that was many—many years ago, Perdita!"

"Shall you not be glad, mother, to visit London again?" demanded the young woman.

"Yes—for 'tis the only city in the world where adventures like ourselves—beggars, I may say—are certain to succeed. Oh! you have no idea of what a pandemonium is the great metropolis of England!" exclaimed the harriidan, with strange emphasis. "'Tis a furnace in which millions of passions, interests, and ideas are ever boiling—boiling madly and as if in rage: 'tis a scene of immense iniquity and of boundless luxury—of wondrous intrigues and ineffable enjoyments."

"Oh! how I long to plunge headlong into that fine city!" cried Perdita. "It is a vortex that will suit my disposition well."

"Aye—and play your cards as I shall prompt," observed her mother; "and you will speedily be the

mistress of all the pleasures which London can afford. But, oh! I am ready to drop with weariness—I am dying with hunger and thirst, Perdita: and not a penny have we to purchase a morsel of bread—"

"I see a strong light yonder—there, mother—in that bye-lane," said the young woman. "Shall we repair in that direction—perhaps it may be a hospitable cottage—"

"No: 'tis a gipsy's encampment—I can distinguish the cart and the tent," interrupted the old wretch. "But the gipsy race are good and generous; and they will not refuse us a morsel of bread and a cup of water."

The two wanderers accordingly proceeded towards the strong light which Perdita had first discovered, and which proved to be, as her mother had surmised, the fire of a gipsy encampment situate in a bye-lane. As they approached, they observed a female form crouching over the blazing faggots, in spite of the intense sultriness of the weather, and apparently watching with attention a huge cauldron that was suspended above the fire in the usual gipsy fashion. When Perdita and her mother drew nearer still, they obtained a more perfect view of that female, whose countenance was thrown out in strong relief by the

lurid flame; and they now perceived that she was a very old woman, bent down with the weight of years, but having nothing in her appearance of that weird-like character which so generally marks gipsy women of advanced age. She seemed to be all alone in the encampment at the time;—and her attitude, which had at first struck the wanderers as being that of a person watching the culinary process, now assumed a more thoughtful and serious character.

"Good dame," said Perdita, "we are sinking with fatigue and famishing through want; and we crave your hospitality."

"Ah! a woman as old as myself doubtless?" exclaimed the gipsy-crone, surveying Perdita's mother with attention. "Come—sit down—you are welcome—you are welcome! I am all by myself for the present: my people have gone to a short distance—on business of their own—but *that* is of no matter to you. Young woman," she continued, addressing herself to Perdita, "you are strong and active: I was once so myself! Ascend into the cart—you will find wooden bowls and spoons—and help yourselves to the contents of the pot. There will be enough for my people when they come back."

The old gipsy spoke in so strange—vague—and peculiar a manner that the wanderers were both impressed with the idea that she must be in her dotage; and the rapid look of intelligence which passed between mother and daughter, showed that they had simultaneously entertained the same idea. Perdita, however, hastened to obey the directions which she had received; and, returning with the utensils, she and her mother commenced a hearty meal upon the broth and soddened poultry and meat which the cauldron contained.

While the two wanderers were thus employed, the old gipsy began rocking herself to and fro, and uttering her thoughts aloud. First she addressed herself to her guests: then, by degrees forgetting their presence, and becoming more and more enshrouded in the mists of her own failing mind, she still continued her musings in an audible tone.

"An old woman and a young one—eh?—then you are doubtless mother and daughter? Ah! I wish that I had a daughter so comely to look upon as yourself, my pretty dear;—but I should not like her to be quite so bold in her demeanour as yourself. You are very lovely: and yet methinks you are scarcely as virtuous as you are beautiful. Oh! now the red blood mantles in your cheeks: but do not take offence. 'T were a sorry deed on my part to offer insult to those who share my hospitality. Yes—I wish that I had a daughter, who would love me in my old age. My own people neglect me: they leave me alone—alone—for many long hours together;—and then I have no other companions but my own thoughts. And strange companions are they at times, I can assure you. Let me see—what was I thinking of when you came up? Oh! I remember now:—yes—I remember now. Fifty years ago—no—it was about forty-nine, I nursed a male child,—the child of Octavia Manners and the Earl of Ellingham. I do not mean this present Earl:—no—no—'t was the late Earl. The child had a peculiar mark on the right arm: 't was near the shoulder. Then I was turned away by the dead Octavia's half-brother, Benjamin Bones—a horrible man, who knew no pity. But the child again fell in my way—Egyptia had it in keeping. Ah! I loved that child—I would have adopted it as my own. For seven years did I retain the boy with me—the dear

boy, whom methinks I see now. But, the wretches—they sent him away: they lost him in Winchester—cast him off purposely on the wide world. Oh! how I regretted that dear, flaxen-headed boy! They told me he was dead—and I mourned for him. Years and years passed away: heaven only knows how many—I cannot stop to count them now. But it must have been twenty or twenty-one years ago that I met the flaxen-haired boy. Boy! no—no—he was a man—a fine, dashing, jovial, rollicking man;—yes—and, woe is me—a highway robber!"

By this time the two wanderers, who had not lost a single word of all that the gipsy crone was thus uttering aloud in her musings, became interested in the wild, yet still connected history which she was relating,—a history that was revealed by the development of her own thoughts and reminiscences, and which she seemed to experience a "pleasing pain" in reciting. But it was the elder of the two listeners—Perdita's mother—who paid the deepest and most particular attention to the crone's audible meditations, and who seemed to experience a presentiment that they were furnishing a subject which might be turned to her own and her daughter's advantage.

"Yes—yes," continued the old gipsy, "we met in Hampshire—and circumstances revealed him to me. The mark on the arm then proved that it was indeed he! I told him the history of his birth—and he expressed his intention to visit London and seek to recover from Old Death—that was the villain Benjamin Bones—the money of which he had been plundered. Alas! poor Tom Rain—you went to the great city to meet your doom! You were captured—you were tried—you were cast for death—and you were hanged on the roof of Horsemonger Lane gaol. Yes—I saw it all with my own eyes: for I was amidst the crowd—drawn thither by God alone can tell what strange infatuation! And if in the deep anguish that rent my heart, there was a single gleam of joy—a single gleam, however faint—'t was to mark how boldly you died, my brave Tom Rain! Died—died!" exclaimed the old gipsy, now speaking with thrilling emphasis: "no—no—you did not die! Methought, however, as did the rest of the multitude, that you were indeed no more: and for years—for many years—for nineteen years have I held that same belief. And during that interval, oft—oft have I thought of thee,—thought of thee as once I knew thee, Tom Rain—a flaxen-headed boy, and before thou didst bear that name of Rainford! Yes—I have thought of thee—aye, and wept bitterly, bitterly. But—am I dreaming—am I becoming crazy?—or is it indeed true that ten days ago, when in London, I saw thee—yes, thee—alive and in the full enjoyment of health and wealth? Ah! I recollect—'t was not a dream: no—no—I saw thee,—and I recognised thee, too, disguised though thou wert. For not even the hair dyed black—nor the change effected by time—nor the plain and unassuming garb,—no—naught could deceive me, Tom Rain, in respect to you! I beheld you in a carriage, with your half-brother the Earl of Ellingham, and with a fine young man whose countenance was of glorious beauty."

These words suddenly made Perdita as attentive and interested a listener as her mother, both having by this time finished their hearty meal.

"Yes—a young man divinely handsome," continued the gipsy-crone, rocking herself to and fro; "with a countenance that would ensnare any young female heart! And I made enquiries—and I learnt that my Tom Rain was now Mr. Hatfield, and that this young

man was his nephew. Oh! I know it was Tom Rain: but how came he thus alive?—by what means was he resuscitated?—who snatched him from the grave? No—no—I am not a drivelling fool—a dreaming idiot, as my people said: I know full well that it was he—I could not be mistaken;—and yet, 'tis impossible to say how he was snatched from death! He is married, too—married to Lady Georgiana Hatfield, whose name he has taken. And they are now all dwelling together at the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham in Pall Mall. I longed to go thither and tell Tom Rain—no, Mr. Hatfield, I mean—that I had recognised him,—tell him that in me he beheld the Miranda whom he once knew: but my people laughed at me—they told me that I was in my dotage—that I was dreaming,—I, who have intellects as keen as ever—and sight so sharp that I knew my dearly-loved Tom Rain in spite of his dyed hair and his changed aspect! Then my people forced me away with them;—but they cannot prevent me from thinking of Tom Rain as much and as often as I choose!”

The gipsy-crone ceased; and now she seemed to become suddenly aware again that she was not alone. But not reflecting that she had been speaking aloud the whole time, and that her two guests had overheard every syllable she had uttered, she turned towards them, making some remark of a perfectly indifferent character. It was easy to perceive that the poor old creature was half demented, in spite of her self-gratulation on the keenness of her intellects: but Perdita's mother was sharp and far-seeing enough to know that many important truths were evidently commingled with the gipsy's rhapsodical reminiscences.

“You have journeyed far to-day?” said Miranda—for such indeed was the crone's name.

“Many miles,” replied Perdita's mother: “but now that we are refreshed through your kindness, we shall push more speedily on to London.”

“Ah! you are taking that pretty child of yours to the great city, which we gipsies abhor and never visit unless on urgent occasions,” observed Miranda. “What is your name, young woman?”

“Perdita,” was the answer.

“Perdita!” repeated the gipsy. “That is a strange name. We have singular names amongst our race: but I never before heard so remarkable a one as that which you bear. What does it mean?”

“Have names any meaning at all?” demanded Perdita's mother, in a tone of impatience. “But, come, daughter—let us thank this good woman, and be off!”

The gipsy was however again rocking herself to and fro before the fire, and seemed to have relapsed into her profound reverie, save that this time she did not give audible utterance to her musings. She was however so much absorbed in thought that she did not hear the thanks that were tendered by the wanderers, nor mark their departure.

CHAPTER CXXVIII.

THE JOURNEY CONTINUED AND CONCLUDED.

PERDITA and her mother exchanged not a word until they reached the high road once more; but when their faces were again turned towards London, the latter exclaimed in a tone of chuckling triumph, “'Twas a lucky chance which threw us in with that gipsy!”

“Yes, mother—as far as obtaining a royal was concerned,” replied Perdita.

“Silly child! it was the old crone's talk that elicited the remark which I just made. Did you not hear the strange facts she suffered to ooze out in her idiotic musings? Did nothing strike you—?”

“Yes: her description of a young man of such divine beauty made so strong an impression upon me, that my very veins appeared to run with lightning,” interrupted Perdita.

“Ah!” cried her mother, evidently struck by a sudden thought: “you were pleased with her allusion to that handsome young gentleman? Well, Perdita—trust me when I declare emphatically that this same young gentleman shall sue at your feet for those favours which unasked you would this moment bestow upon him!”

“Mother, you yourself will soon appear to me to be indulging in idiotic musings!” cried Perdita, half in delight—half in contemptuous incredulity. “You never saw this young man—you know nothing of him—”

“Know nothing of him!” repeated her mother, scornfully. “We know enough, Perdita, to compel a whole family to implore our forbearance and our mercy,—to reduce that Mr. Hatfield, Lady Georgiana, and their nephew to the necessity of beseeching our silence on their bended knees!”

“Do you really put faith in the rhodomontade of that gipsy about the identity of the Mr. Hatfield of whom she spoke with a certain Tom Rain who had been hanged?” demanded Perdita, impatiently.

“Yes—because I know it to be true!” ejaculated her mother. “Listen, Perdita:—you were not born at that time—but it was only a few months before your birth when the whole metropolis was astounded by the sudden discovery that Tom Rain, the highwayman, was indeed alive. I was in London at the time—”

“In Newgate, mother?” asked her daughter, as coolly as if it were the most common-place question.

“Yes—in Newgate, if you must have me be particular in every detail,” answered the old hurridan, bitterly.

“Where I was born,” remarked Perdita. “One of the first places I shall request you to show me, will be that same Newgate. But go on—I am listening attentively.”

“Well, then—I was in Newgate at the time that all London was astounded by certain discoveries relative to this same Tom Rainford—all brought about in consequence of a dreadful murder committed by that very Benjamin Bones whom you heard the gipsy mention. The story is too long to tell you now; but you shall have it shortly in its fullest details—for it may regard our interests more nearly than you at present imagine. One fact I must however state,—which is that Thomas Rainford was a famous highwayman who was hanged, and that by some means which never transpired, he was rescued from death—resuscitated, in fine. He received the royal pardon for all the deeds he had committed in opposition to the laws; and what afterwards became of him I knew not—”

“Because you had to leave England in pursuance of your sentence, I suppose, mother?” added Perdita, enquiringly.

“Precisely so. And now chance throws us in the way of an old crone who, in the audible musings of dotage, informs us that this same Tom Rain is actually living under a feigned name—aye, and at the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham. It is clear that the gipsy

had never heard of the
appeared

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lurid flames, and the wondrous fact that Rainford was in London disguised as a Blackamoor, only a few months after his execution, as I may call it: it is evident that the circumstance of his having survived the scaffold was unknown to her and to her companions. Thus was she struck with amazement and surprise, as well she might be under such circumstances, when she beheld him in Lord Ellingham's carriage. But gipsies go so little into great cities and towns—hold so little intercourse with any save their own people—and are so little curious in respect to matters which do not immediately concern themselves, that it is not surprising if the old gipsy had never heard reported the well-known fact of Rainford's resuscitation."

"Then you presume that this Rainford is now living, honourably and respectably, in London, under the name of Hatfield," said Perdita, enquiringly; "and you mean to use your knowledge of his real name to work out our particular aims?"

"You now comprehend me, daughter," returned the old woman; "and you may perhaps begin to understand how his nephew shall become bound to you by silken cords."

"I have set my mind upon that handsome young man," said Perdita, emphatically; "and believe me, I shall omit nothing that will tend to gratify my passion."

"Wanton—voluptuous, even as I was," muttered the harridan to herself;—"aye, licentious and depraved as was her father!"

"What are you mumbling to yourself, mother?" demanded Perdita. "Something about me, I warrant."

"No harm—no harm," responded the wretch, hastily. "But, to return to the subject of our conversation, Perdita: what do you think of our prospects now?—knowing all we do of this Mr. Hatfield, and able as we are to overwhelm him, his titled wife, and his nephew in disgrace, if we choose to utter a single word."

"I think that all will go well enough in respect to money; for *that* we have the means of extorting," said Perdita. "But I cannot see how, by such a course, we shall do otherwise than disgust the nephew, and make an enemy of him."

"Ah! short-sighted girl!" ejaculated her mother. "We must not commence with extortion! I know that Lady Georgiana Hatfield was very rich when I was a resident in London years ago; and it is not probable that she has become poor since. Then again, this Hatfield or Rainford must be on intimate terms with the Earl of Ellingham, since he and his family are residing at that nobleman's mansion. All this denotes that the young man can command ample funds at will;—and the young man, then, must be ensnared by your wiles. But if you surrender yourself to him immediately—"

"Trust me for knowing how to play my cards well!" interrupted Perdita, impatiently. "But on our arrival in London to-night, where are we to find a dwelling-place?—how are we to clothe ourselves decently to-morrow?—how, in a word, are we to live until all these grand schemes begin to work?"

"You shall see, Perdita," answered her mother. "During my long sojourn in Australia, one person in England wrote to me frequently—one person sent me sums of money occasionally. Otherwise, Perdita, after I obtained my ticket of leave, we should have starved: for the labour of my hands, severely as I toiled, pro-

duced not sufficient to maintain us both. This one person lives in London: I know his address;—and to his door must we first repair before we can even procure the wherewith to obtain a bed!"

"Is it the friend who, as you told me, interested himself to procure your pardon?" demanded Perdita.

"The friend!—the relation you mean," said her mother, hastily. "Yes—he is my relation—the only one I possess in the world save yourself, if a daughter can be called by that name."

The conversation, which may have served to throw additional light upon the depraved character of these two women, was interrupted by the necessity of stepping to the side of the road to permit a cart, which was on the point of overtaking them, to pass. The vehicle was driven along at a rapid pace by a sturdy, good-natured butcher; and as it was whisking by the two females, the pure moon-light falling fully on the handsome countenance of Perdita, enabled the man to catch a glimpse of the surpassing beauty of that face.

Instantly pulling up, he said, "Holloa! my good women, you are out late—or rather early—for 't is two o'clock in the morning."

"We are very tired, and are anxious to reach London as soon as possible," replied Perdita's mother.

"I am going as one may say right through London," observed the butcher. "In fact, to Oxford Street—and if you like to have a ride, both of you, I'll put you down at the nearest point to where your business leads you."

The old woman greedily snapped at the offer; and the good-natured butcher helped her daughter and herself into the cart, which immediately drove on again at a spanking pace.

And now full soon did the myriad lights of London greet the eyes of the travellers; and Perdita felt her heart dilate with ineffable emotion as she drew near that sovereign city of a thousand towers, pinnacles, and spires,—that mighty Babylon in which all her hopes, her aims, her ambitious views were centred. A misty haze of light, resembling a faintly illuminated fog, appeared to hang over the vast metropolis;—and as the vehicle approached nearer and nearer still, the countless dwellings began to stand out in relief from the bosom of that dimly lustrous shroud. On—on the travellers go: the houses are scattered along the road;—but in a short time they become continuous ranges of habitations;—and now it may be airily said that the wheels of the cart rattle on the pavement of London.

But a feeling of disappointment seizes upon Perdita: instead of lordly mansions, she sees dingy-looking tenements of no considerable size, and presenting any thing but an imposing appearance, especially at that sombre hour. Nevertheless, the farther she advances the more satisfied does she become;—and now the travellers reach that great junction-point for cross-roads, where stands the Elephant and Castle.

The tap is open—the butcher stops, alights, and disappears inside the establishment. In a few minutes he returns with a steaming hot glass of brandy-and-water,—for a good-natured fellow is this butcher;—and he kindly proffers it to the two females. It was not because Perdita was so handsome, that he did it: no—it was through pure kindness, and as much for the sake of her mother as of herself. Nor did the two females require much pressing to partake of the welcome beverage; and while they were drinking their glass, their good-hearted friend hurried back to the tap to enjoy *his own* reeking jorum.

And now away they speed again—up the Waterloo Road—over the bridge. Then and there it was that a splendid and soul-stirring spectacle burst upon the sight of Perdita:—for an instant her admiration was rivetted to that magnificent piece of masonry constituting the finest viaduct of the kind in the whole world:—but in the next she threw her glances right and left, embracing thus rapidly all the splendid features of a scene bathed in silver by the cloudless lamp of night. The bosom of the mighty Thames reflected the lights on the banks and the bridges,—those very lights tracing the course of the proud stream and marking its ample width:—then her looks dwelt on the mighty dome of Saint Paul's, rearing its colossal head to the deep purple summer sky;—and lastly they ran rapidly along the northern shore, embracing each point of interest, until they stopped at the New Houses of Parliament, so gleamingly white in the chaste lustre of the moon.

"Yes, mother," she whispered, in an exulting tone: "this is indeed a stupendous city!"

"You have seen nothing of it as yet," was the reply. "But here we must alight," added the old woman, the moment the cart reached the Strand.

The wanderers accordingly descended; and, having proffered their hearty thanks to the butcher for his kindness, they continued their journey on foot, their way now lying in the direction of Brompton.

Along the Strand they proceeded—through Spring Gardens—into St. James's Park,—Perdita admiring the fine buildings which she passed; for the morning was now breaking, and each grand feature of that part of the metropolis emerged slowly and majestically from obscurity.

Perdita's mother, in pointing out Carlton House to her daughter, observed, "When I was last in England George the Fourth was King; and that was his favourite residence."

They proceeded through the park;—and now Perdita beheld the abode of the Queen of England—that palace on which so much of the country's money has been shamefully squandered, and with the arrangements of which her Majesty is still dissatisfied! God help Victoria, if she cannot contrive to make herself comfortable at Buckingham House; we sincerely hope that she will always find such quarters gratuitously provided for her, and that she will learn not to grumble at them. Contrast that palace with the working-man's home, and then let us see whether Parliament would be justified in voting another sixpence to enlarge or improve the sovereign residence. Oh! how loathsome—how revolting to our mind are the caprices, the selfishness, and the insolence of Royalty!

The two wanderers now entered the spacious district of Pimlico, which they traversed painfully—for they had become almost as wearied as when they were toiling on between Dartford and Shooter's Hill.

"Shall we soon be there, mother?" enquired Perdita, her handsome countenance bearing a care-worn expression as if patience and strength were alike nearly exhausted.

"In less than twenty minutes now," was the answer, "we shall reach the place whither we are bound."

"And suppose your nephew should not be in London?" said Perdita.

"Ah! now you have touched the very chord which vibrates with anguish to my heart's core!" exclaimed the old woman. "But let us not yield to despondency," she added, almost immediately.

"No—it is useless to meet evils half way," observed Perdita.

The two proceeded in silence for upwards of a quarter of an hour, until they reached a particular part of Brompton, when the elder wanderer said, "It must be somewhere about here that he lives. Ah! Number Seven! Yes—*this* is the house, Perdita!" she added, indicating a beautiful cottage-residence, standing alone in the midst of a pleasant garden. "But it will be useless for you to accompany me," continued the hag; "on the contrary, many reasons, which I will hereafter explain, render it advisable that my nephew should not come to know you by sight."

"Just as you please, mother," said Perdita, in the quiet way which was habitual to her when she had no inclination either on one side or the other. "There is a large stone at the angle of the road yonder: I will rest there until you return."

"Do so," replied the old woman; and, having paused for a few moments to dwell admiringly on the fine symmetry of her daughter's form as Perdita repaired slowly towards the point indicated, the harridan advanced to the door of the house in which her relation dwelt.

She knocked and rang;—and in a few minutes a servant-maid, throwing open a window, enquired who it was that came at such an unseasonable hour.

"Is your master at home?" demanded the old woman.

"He is: but——"

"Thank God!" ejaculated the visitor, considerably relieved by this announcement. "You must inform him that an elderly female wishes to speak to him on particular business——"

"I cannot venture to disturb him," answered the servant. "Come at eight o'clock: master and missus will be up then."

At this moment another window was opened, and a gentleman, who had evidently slipped on a dressing-gown in great haste, appeared at the casement, exclaiming, "I will see you now—at once!"

And in less than a minute the old woman was admitted into the dwelling by the gentleman who had thus addressed her.

Not a word was uttered,—merely hasty glances of recognition were exchanged, and those looks dubious on her part and reserved on his,—until they entered a parlour, the door of which the gentleman carefully closed, while his visitress sank exhausted upon a sofa.

"I am returned at last, Clarence," she said, in a low and hoarse voice,—for she was now evidently much moved at finding herself in the presence of her relative, and by no means so confident as she had appeared to her daughter with regard to the reception she was likely to experience.

"Yes—returned, against my express desire—against the solemn promise that you sent me to remain in the colony if I procured your pardon!" exclaimed Mr. Villiers—for it was he—in a reproachful tone.

"Would you have had me bury myself in that horrible place of exile?" demanded his aunt—Mrs. Torrens, or Mrs. Slingsby, or whatever she now denominated herself.

"I would have had you keep your pledge so sacredly given," replied Clarence; "and on my side I should have fulfilled my engagement by remitting you forty pounds every half-year. Why—why have you come back to England?"

"Because I would sooner die than remain in a

colony where I have endured so much," responded the woman.

"Yes—you have endured much indeed," said Mr. Villiers, still more bitterly than before: "but it has been your own fault. Do you remember the interviews I had with you in prison both prior and subsequent to your condemnation? Did you not exhibit every sign of the deepest contrition—utter every possible vow of amendment? And what were the results? Arrived in the colony, you became unruly—profligate—a perfect scandal where all is scandalous—shameless where every thing is shameful—"

"Listen to me, Clarence!" exclaimed his aunt, rising from the sofa and advancing towards him: "it is so easy to reproach—but not so easy to admit of extenuation for guilt. As God is my judge, my penitence in Newgate was sincere—my contrition unfeigned! I even longed for the hour of my departure to arrive, that I might for ever quit a country where I had played so vile a part, and to some extent retrieve my character in a penal colony. But when I set foot on board the convict-ship, I found myself thrown into the depths of a very sink of immorality,—plunged into an infernal stew of profligacy, from which escape was impossible. I threw myself on my knees before the surgeon, and implored him to remove me from that dreadful assemblage of fiends in female shape: he laughed at me, and bade me return to my place. Then my companions abused and ill-treated me for having dared to complain;—and the babe which I bore in my arms was made the subject of the bitterest taunts and most cutting gibes. I had named her *Perdita*—as you well know—that her lost and hopeless condition, through the infamy of her mother, might ever be retained fresh in my memory, and that the necessity of toiling hard and honourably for her might be impressed on my soul even by the warning nature of that very name. But, oh! those wretches, with whom I was forced to associate, levelled the most cruel jeers and jests against me on account of that innocent babe; because she was born in Newgate! And nothing is so galling—nothing so terribly afflicting—nothing so poignantly cutting, as to insult a woman through the medium of her illegitimate, helpless babe! My God! what bitter tears I shed on board that convict-ship,—tears which seemed to sear my very countenance as they fell, so scalding were they! Then the frightful scenes which were enacted in our cabin,—the quarrelling that took place, the imprecations that accompanied even the simplest remark, the obscene tales that were told,—oh! it was horrible, horrible. I struggled against the contamination as mortal being never struggled before:—but it was like a combat between a drowning person and the fury of a whelming torrent,—a vain, ineffectual, and useless fight, in which I felt myself to be completely powerless;—until, in despair, I resigned myself to the flood that was whirling me along in its triumphant course;—and I found relief even in drinking of that feculent, scetid stream from which there was no escape. Yes—thus was I drawn down into the whirlpool of immoralities and profligacies on the brink of which the law placed me:—and if my vows of contrition—my asseverations of penitence proved so many delusions, you must blame the system to which I was subjected—and not myself."

"And do you mean, then, to inform me that you endeavoured to be moral, reserved, pious, and tranquil on board the convict-ship—but that it was impossible to avoid being dragged into the common abyss of de-

pravity?" demanded Clarence, now speaking in a mild and even compassionate tone.

"Most solemnly do I swear that such is the fact!" exclaimed his aunt, with an emphasis which spoke volumes in favour of her sincerity.

"Then are you to be pitied, poor woman," said Clarence; "and the Government of that day must bear all the blame of your relapse and subsequent depravity. But where is your daughter *Ferdita*!"

"She is in the neighbourhood—waiting for me," was the answer. "I did not choose to bring her beneath your roof. Indeed, naught save necessity—necessity the most stern—should have led me hither."

"The accounts which I received from a correspondent at Sydney, spoke, alas! most unfavourably of your daughter," observed Clarence. "My God! could you not at least have saved her from entering the paths that lead to perdition?"

"Behold, now, how ready you are to blame me!" cried his aunt, in a voice expressive of vexation. "I was allotted as a servant to a free-settler in the penal colony; and the man made me his mistress. There was no compliance on my part in the first instance: 't was absolute compulsion. Then I yielded to my fate, seeing that it was useless to contend against it. I had to work hard all day; and the moment *Perdita* was able to run alone, she played in the streets with the other poor children of Sydney. I could not prevent it—do all I would to endeavour to keep her in doors. Well, at last I obtained a ticket of leave, and tried to earn a livelihood by the toil of my own hands. But to do this, I was compelled to be out all day;—and then, where was *Perdita*? Where was she?" almost screamed the woman, becoming much excited: "why—lost—as her name implies;—not lost as you lose an object and can find it no more,—but lost *morally*—irretrievably lost! 'Tis true that I imparted to her as much knowledge as I myself possessed or had leisure to instil into her—and that to do this I deprived myself of my natural rest. But how could I teach her virtue?—how could I read the Bible with her? My story was known throughout the colony;—and *Perdita* learnt before even she had intelligence to understand the meaning of the facts, that she was a bastard—born in Newgate, the great criminal prison of London—and that her mother was every thing infamous and vile! My God! circumstances would not allow me to nurture her in moral ways, even if I had possessed the inclination: but by the time she was old enough to learn, I had myself become as deeply steeped in profligacy as any other woman in the colony. Can you wonder, then, that she soon fell into the ways of vice? Beautiful as she was—and is—she soon attracted notice;—and your fine English officers—the gentlemen sent out to protect the colony,—they were the authors of her ruin—and they encouraged her in a career of infamy. Oh! Clarence, it is a frightful thing for me to stand before you—you, who are my own nephew—and have to make such horrible revelations: but you reproach me for my own wickedness—you would seek to represent me as the cause of my daughter's wickedness—and I am forced to explain to you the appalling nature of the influences acting upon us, and the circumstances surrounding us. Now—now, I could weep in humiliation;—but an hour hence, I shall be obdurate and hardened as ever. The world has made me so."

"And now what do you propose to do?" enquired Clarence. "It is impossible for me even to advise you in the frightful position in which you are placed, and

since you have acted so completely in opposition to my counsel by returning to England. Pecuniary assistance—that I can afford you to a limited amount—”

“Give me fifty guineas, Clarence—and you shall never see me more,” interrupted his aunt.

“I will spare you a hundred,” answered the generous-hearted young man; and quitting the room, he returned in a few minutes, bringing the money in a bag. “Here,” he said,—“take that, my poor aunt—and may God make it prosper in your hands. But, oh! suffer not your daughter to continue in the ways of vice and depravity: remember that she possesses an immortal soul—and that there is another world in which an account must be given for the conduct pursued in this.”

The old woman made no answer; but, clutching the bag eagerly, she secured it amongst her tattered garments. Then, ashamed of the greedy impatience which she had manifested, and seeking to avert her nephew’s attention from the fact by turning the conversation into another channel, she said, “I hope you continue to enjoy that happiness, Clarence, which yourself and your excellent Adelaïs so much deserve!”

“Thank God! my felicity is as complete as man’s can be in this world,” was the reply. “Having now for upwards of nineteen years held the good situation which my kind patron, the Earl of Ellingham, gave me, I have enjoyed a certain means of existence—have acquired influential friends—and have been enabled to rear my sons and daughters in a way which, I hope, will be salutary to them on their entrance into life.”

“And that man—my husband—have you heard of him lately?” enquired Villiers’ aunt, in a low tone and hesitating way.

“Never since the occasion—and that is now nine years ago—when he wrote to announce the death of poor Rosamond at Geneva. I mentioned that fact to you in a letter which accompanied one of the remittances I made to Sydney on your behalf—”

“And from that time you have received no tidings of my husband?”

“Not once!” replied Villiers. “Whether he be alive or dead—what has become of him, I cannot tell you. This uncertainty relative to her father’s fate is a cause of uneasiness to Adelaïs—but every state and station in life has its annoyances and its sorrows. Poor Rosamond! she fell into a slow decline shortly after leaving England—and for nearly ten years did she linger on, wasting away! Adelaïs and I saw her once during that period: we visited Switzerland on purpose. Then how deeply was my wife shocked when she beheld the wreck that remained of her once lovely and blooming sister. But I cannot dwell upon that episode in our lives—”

“No—no,” exclaimed Perdita’s mother, now in haste to depart. “I will not distress you,” she added, with a hypocritical appearance of sympathy, “by exacting the painful narrative from you. Farewell, Clarence—farewell!”

The generous-hearted Villiers proffered his hand to his aunt,—that aunt who was once so fine a woman, so elegantly dressed, and the mistress of a splendid mansion,—but who was now hideous to look upon, clothed in rags, and as yet homeless on the face of the earth!

For a few instants her heart swelled with profound emotions as she pressed that hand which was thus kindly extended to her, and tears rose to the very brims of her eyes, but did not run over.

Then she hurried away from his presence:—and the moment she set foot on the threshold of the dwelling—or rather, when its door closed behind her—she subdued the feelings that had well nigh overpowered her; and gave all her attention—all her interest—all her thoughts to the precious bag which she had concealed amongst her garments.

“Well, mother, I thought you were never coming back!” cried Perdita, in a reproachful tone: then, perceiving by the old woman’s countenance that she had good news, she allowed her own to brighten up, as she hurried to meet her.

“Perdita—we have now the means—”

“Of obtaining shelter and a breakfast, I hope?”

“Of purchasing good clothes—taking fine lodgings—”

“Oh! then your nephew—or relation of some kind, whatever he may be—has behaved well!” cried the young woman, overjoyed by this intelligence.

“A hundred guineas, Perdita—a hundred guineas in this bag!” exclaimed her mother, shaking the precious object of her avaricious worship: then, again concealing it beneath her rags, she said, “But come, Perdita: let us betake ourselves to another quarter of the town—for I have promised Clarence Villiers that he shall see my face no more.”

The old hag and the handsome young woman retraced their way into the heart of London; and, arriving in the neighbourhood of Covent Garden, they entered an early breakfast-house, where they partook of a copious meal, to which appetite and good spirits enabled them to do honour.

The repast being despatched, the elder of the two wanderers had a few minutes’ whispering conversation with the landlady of the establishment; the result of which was that a bed-room was speedily placed at the disposal of the guests, who retired to partake of a few hours’ most necessary repose.

It was near mid-day when the mother and daughter rose; and then another interview with the landlady was shortly followed, in obedience to the instructions given her, by the arrival of a woman who sold second-hand female apparel, and who came laden with band-boxes. The contents thereof were speedily examined; and the wanderers having selected the articles which seemed most appropriate for their temporary use, the slop-seller was well paid and dismissed.

And now Perdita and her parent began to assume each a very different appearance from that which they had so recently worn. Copious ablutions and decent clothing made the elder less revoltingly ugly, and the younger more strikingly beautiful.

As they thus performed their toilette together, in the little chamber of the coffee-house, the mother surveyed, with pride and admiration, the features and form of her daughter,—calculating at the same time how large a fortune the judicious sale of such loveliness was likely to amass;—while on her side the young woman stood in superb complacency before the glass, exercising a thousand little arts to render the details of her toilette as perfect as circumstances would admit.

Perdita’s dark brown hair was combed out with the utmost care, and arranged in simple bands, glossy and massive on either side of her fine forehead. By chance she had obtained from the second-hand dealer a gown which precisely fitted her, and which, being very low in the body, displayed her full and swelling bust to its greatest advantage. The darned stockings and the clumsy shoes were superseded by more fitting articles; and now the robust leg, the slender ankle, and the long

narrow foot were as faultless in proportion as if a sculptor had modelled them to his own exquisite but voluptuous taste. A neat straw bonnet and an ample shawl completed her attire;—and now well, but by no means splendidly nor elegantly dressed, Perdita appeared a creature so exceedingly handsome, that even her mother was surprised as much as she was delighted.

And, as for the old woman herself, she had assumed an air of greater respectability than at first might have appeared possible—seeing that her look was sinister and repulsive, and her countenance so weather-beaten and marred by suffering!

Forth went the mother and daughter into the streets of London;—and their first care was to purchase a variety of articles of attire of a far better kind than that which they had just procured,—likewise a little jewellery and the necessary *paraphernalia* of the toilette. The goods were all sent to the coffee-house where they had hired a chamber; and a couple of large trunks were the last objects they bought, and which were despatched to the same place.

These matters having been accomplished, the old woman conducted her daughter into the fashionable quarter of Regent Street; and there Perdita beheld enough to excite her wonder and her admiration. The magnificent shops—the fine buildings—the splendid equipages—and the handsomely dressed gentlemen on horseback, all shared her attention in their turns:—nor was she, an observer, unobserved—for many an old voluptuary and stripling gallant paused to bestow a second glance upon the plainly but decently dressed young female whose countenance was so strikingly beautiful, and in whose looks there was a subdued wantonness engendering the most voluptuous sensations.

To Perdita's mother how altered did London seem! Here was a street which she had never seen before—there a street had been pulled down to make way for some great thoroughfare. Here buildings once familiar had disappeared: there strange edifices had sprung up! In Regent Street she looked for the shops at which she had been accustomed to deal long years before, when she dwelt in the immediate neighbourhood, and when she was deemed a *saint*: but most of the establishments she sought had changed their proprietors and their nature,—a grocer's having become a book-seller's, a milliner's a china warehouse, and so on. She had a great mind to pass into Burlington Street; but she had not quite the necessary courage to do that—at least for the present.

Having threaded Regent Street from Oxford Circus to Waterloo Place, the two women turned into Pall Mall West, along which they proceeded for a short distance, when the mother suddenly clasped her daughter's arm almost violently, exclaiming in a hasty whisper at the same time, "This is the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham!"

Scarcely were these words uttered, when the door was opened, and forth came Charles Hatfield. Passing by the two females without noticing that he had immediately become the object of their most earnest attention,—and indeed, without observing them at all, so deeply was he absorbed in thought,—he moved on at a slow and uncertain pace, as if he had merely come out to seek the fresh air, and having no particular destination.

Yes:—he had indeed become the cynosure of attraction on the part of the old woman and her daughter,—the former devouring him with her eyes,

in order to read his character and disposition in his countenance, and assure herself from that physiognomical perusal that he was fitted for her purpose,—and the latter embracing with a look of ardent, wanton scrutiny every feature of his fine face and every proportion of his symmetrical form.

He passed on:—and for a few minutes the mother and daughter preserved a deep silence, each occupied with her own thoughts.

"That young man may be rendered pliant and docile according to our will," said the old woman at length.

"He is beyond all doubt the one whom the gipsy alluded to in such glowing colours," observed Perdita, with a voluptuous languor in the eyes, a flushing of the cheeks, and a slow but deep heaving of the bosom.

"And he has something on his mind—that is clear!" added the old woman.

"Which we will soon make him divulge to us," said Perdita. "But how do you intend to proceed in order to form his acquaintance?"

"Oh! nothing is more easy!" returned her mother. "In the first place we must take handsome lodgings. I know of a nice, quiet, retired street in the neighbourhood. Come along, Perdita—we must not waste valuable time."

The two women repaired direct to Suffolk Street, Pall Mall East; and in the window of a house of handsome appearance they saw a card announcing furnished apartments to be let. The lodgings were speedily inspected and hired, the prepayment of a month's rent immediately ensuring the good opinion of the landlady and rendering references unnecessary.

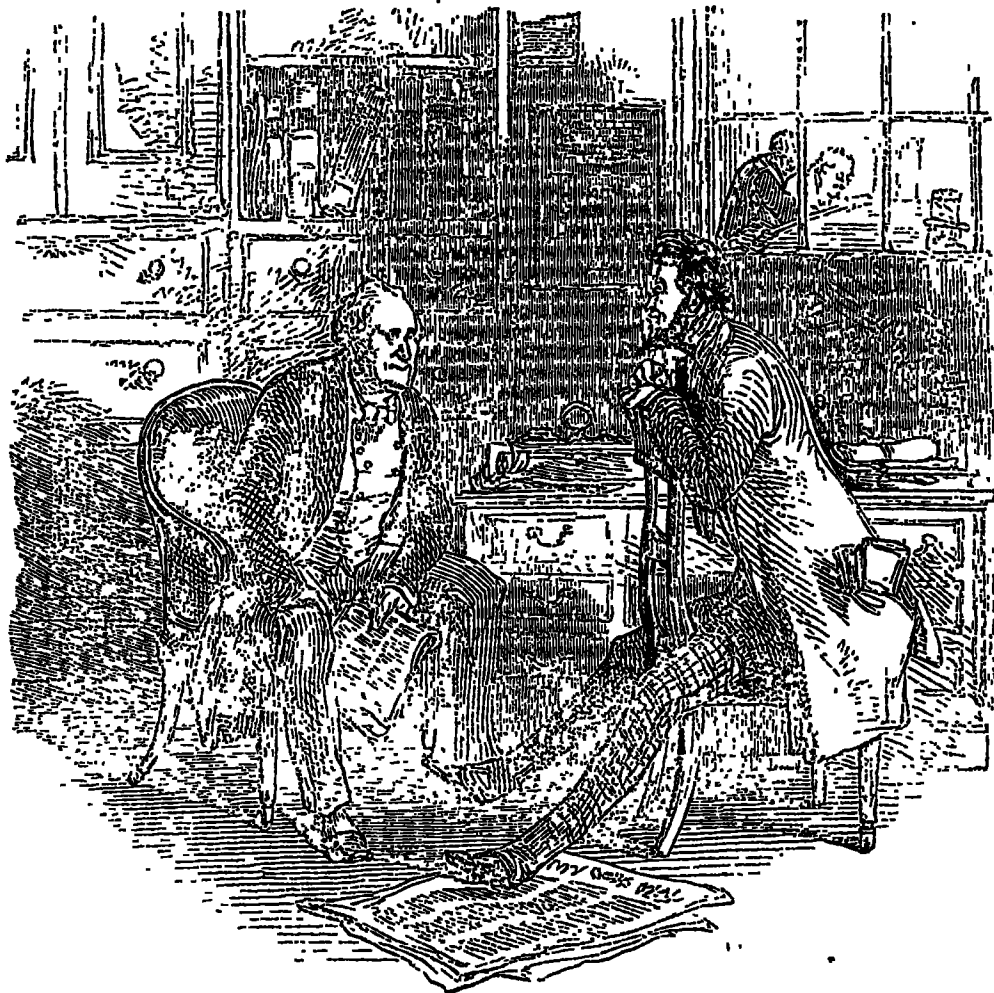
Back to the coffee-house in the vicinity of Covent Garden did the wanderers hasten; and in a few minutes all their packages and new purchases were transported to a hackney coach, which was fetched from the nearest stand. The coffee-house keeper was liberally rewarded, and a handsome fee was bestowed upon the driver of the vehicle to induce him to state, in case of being questioned in Suffolk Street, that he had brought the ladies from some respectable hotel.

All these matters being arranged, the mother and daughter proceeded in the hackney-coach to their new lodgings, where they at once took up their quarters under the imposing name of Mrs. and Miss Fitzhardinge.

Had the worthy butcher who a few hours previously took pity on the two ragged, sinking mendicants, and sustained their strength and courage by means of hot brandy-and-water at the Elephant and Castle,—had he now beheld Mrs. and Miss Fitzhardinge sitting down, elegantly attired, at a well spread dinner-table, and at the fashionable time of six in the evening,—he would not for an instant have supposed that the way-worn beggars of the morning's adventure and the ladies of Suffolk Street, Pall Mall, were identical: or if, by chance, he should have recognised Perdita's handsome countenance, he would have thought that the delusions of enchantment had been practised upon him or her.

And now we have prepared the way, with due prefatory explanation, for one of the most striking and remarkable episodes in this narrative.—an episode showing how Perdita's arts and Perdita's beauty accomplished aims which women of less enterprise than herself and her mother would have deemed impossible.

Oh! fatal influence—that influence which the depraved and wanton Perdita wielded by means of her transcendent charms!



CHAPTER CXXIX.

THE ADVERTISING AGENT.

On the day after the one the incidents of which have just been related, Mr. Bubbleton Styles called, precisely as the clock struck eleven in the forenoon, upon an advertising agent dwelling in the immediate vicinity of Cornhill.

The agent, knowing that Mr. Styles was the registered promoter of a scheme which had obtained the patronage of the high and mighty Mr. Podgson, was particularly civil and urbane; and having bowed him into the private office, and presented him with a chair, he said, "Now, Mr. Styles, sir—what can I do for you?"

"I intend to give the newspapers a round of advertisements," answered the City gentleman, pulling out his prospectuses.

"Softly—softly, my dear sir," exclaimed the agent: "you must be guided by me in this. If you went to the generality of agents, they would say, 'Oh! advertise by all means in every paper in existence:'—but Mr. Styles, am a little more conscientious. There are some journals, in fact, which are perfectly useless as

advertising media: it would be money completely thrown away."

"I am much obliged to you for your kindness," said Mr. Styles. "Of course we shall advertise in the *Times*."

"As a matter of course!" cried the agent. "'Tis the great daily Leviathan which every body sees, no matter what his politics may be. The *Morning Chronicle*, too, is a good medium: the *Herald*, *Post*, and *Advertiser* must likewise be included;—and it would be folly to omit the *Sun*, *Globe*, and *Standard*."

"Well—and what about the *Daily News* and the *Express*?" asked Mr. Styles, apparently astonished that no reference should have been made to those prints.

"The *Daily News*," ejaculated the agent, in perfect wonderment: "the *Express*," he cried, in horrified amazement. "Excuse me, my dear friend—but are you mad? Have you taken leave of your senses?"

"I hope not," responded Mr. Styles, in his usual calm, business-like manner. "What makes you think so?"

"What makes me think so?" repeated the agent; "why, the idea that you should for an instant entertain the notion of advertising in those contemptible

abortions! They are a perfect disgrace to newspaper literature, sir," proceeded the agent, who was speaking conscientiously, and indeed truly. "Did you ever happen to read the *Daily News*?"

"I have never seen the paper in my life," answered Mr. Styles: "I had only heard of it."

"And you are not likely to see it," returned the agent, "unless you go into the heart of Wapping or explore the back slums of Whitechapel. No respectable newsman keeps it: not that newsmen are more particular than other shop-keepers—but they only keep what they can sell, Mr. Styles. As for the *Express*, it is a regular cheat of an evening paper—made up entirely of the articles in the *Daily News*, without even having the bad grammar and the typographical errors corrected. But both prints are the most contemptible threepenny things I ever saw in my life; and one would be inclined to fancy that all the real newspaper talent had been absorbed by the pre-existing journals, leaving only the meanest literary scrubs in London to do the *News* and the *Express*."

"And yet I thought that the *News* had been started under the auspices of Mr. Charles Dickens—the immortal *Boz*?" said Mr. Styles, interrogatively.

"So it was," replied the advertising agent; "but the name of Charles Dickens was rather damnable than useful to a newspaper-speculation. Every one must admit that *Boz* is a great novelist—a very great novelist indeed—the Fielding of his age; but he is totally incapable of writing for a newspaper. The proprietors of the *News* made a tremendous splash with his name; but they only created a quagmire for themselves to flounder in. When their paper was first coming out, every body thought it was to do wonders. The *Times* was to lose half its subscribers; and the *Chronicle* was to be ruined altogether. But, alas! never did so labouring a mountain produce such a contemptible mouse; and people began to fancy that the wags engaged on *Punch* had started the *Daily News* as a grand parody on the newspaper press. The leaders were rubbish—the criticisms of new works, mere nonsense—the dramatic reviews, utter balderdash. It however seems that in the lowest depths there is a deeper still even with the bathos of journalists; for when the *News* tumbled down (which it soon did) to a two-penny halfpenny print, the rubbish, the nonsense, and the balderdash became more astounding still. There is a young man named Bilk who does the 'moral department' of the paper; and he is the most grovelling ass that ever was created. He undertakes to review a whole batch of cheap publications in a lump; but what he calls *reviewing* is nothing else than *abusing* the works with an insolence so cool, and a rashness so indiscriminate that he must be as consummate a coxcomb as he is an unprincipled ruffian. The *News* affects a moral tone, and entrusts its conscience to this half buffoon—half-barbarian, in the hope that the lucubrations of the ungrammatical scribe may acquire for it the reputation of a serious, sober, and sedate journal. The despicable being to whom I allude is the son of the proprietor of the *Assinæum*—a paper which Bulwer mauled and exposed so terribly in one of his admirable novels many years ago. The articles in the *Assinæum* may be termed TWADDLE UPON STILTS —"

"You are really very inveterate in your denunciations of these prints," observed Mr. Styles, who having an hour to spare, did not experience any impatience in listening to the agent's remarks.

"Not at all inveterate—only justly indignant," was

the answer. "I am indignant, because I admire the newspaper press of Great Britain—I am proud of it—I glory in belonging to the country which possesses it; and therefore when I see journalism prostituted to the lowest and meanest purposes—when I behold such despicable abortions as the *Daily News* and the *Express* daring to show themselves in that sphere where respectability and talent alone existed until those three-penny things made their appearance,—I am angry—I am disgusted! Only see how the *News* has been tinkered and hacked about with the idea of making it a property. First it was five-pence—then it was two-pence halfpenny—next it was three-pence;—and yet with all this derogatory experimentalising, the owners have failed to make it a property. What a miserable thing does it look, with its beggarly three columns of advertisements! The *Times* has as many in a day as the *News* has had altogether since its sickly existence began. The very Parliamentary Reporters engaged upon the *News* are ashamed of their connexion with such a scurvy affair; and the doorkeeper of the Gallery of the House of Commons looks on them with kind commiseration, knowing how degrading it must be to their feelings to take their places in the seats allotted to the representatives of that three-penny hodge-podge. You never see the *News* quoted from nor alluded to by its contemporaries. It is not recognised as a member of the newspaper press. It has tried all imaginable kinds of manoeuvres to force itself into notoriety,—sometimes currying favour with the superior journals, and at others abusing them; but all to no purpose. Its contemporaries will not notice it: they will not be bullied nor coaxed into such condescension. Why—would you believe that the very Editor is heartily ashamed of his post: but he knows that if he resigned it, he should be compelled to relapse into the lowest walks of penny-a-lining, whence he was dragged forth to conduct the thing."

"How is it possible that such a contemptible journal continues in existence?" asked Mr. Styles.

"There! now you puzzle me indeed!" exclaimed the advertising agent. "The question you have put to me involves one of the greatest mysteries of London; and I am quite incapable of affording you the solution. Time will however show: for, in this case, time must clear up all doubt and uncertainty regarding the matter. For the present, however, take my advice and refrain from advertising in a paper which is contemptible in circulation and influence—scurrilous* or

* "An obscure threepenny print, called the *Daily News*, published in its impression of November 2nd, an article purporting to be a notice of the leading works belonging to the sphere of Cheap Literature, but in which a vile, cowardly, and ruffian-like attack was made upon Mrs. Reynolds's novel of 'GREYNA GREEN.' The article alluded to appeared in the evening of the same date in the *Express*, a paper made up from the contents of the other, but of whose existence we were totally unaware until the occurrence of the matter in question. The attack, though evidently written by some silly boy, was so savage and malignant, and was made up of such a pack of atrocious lies, that it became necessary to take some kind of notice of it, although neither the *Daily News* nor its evening reflex enjoy a circulation or an influence sufficient to effect the amount of mischief which the dastardly scribe sought to accomplish. Our solicitors were accordingly instructed to write to the Editors of the *News* and *Express*, requiring a complete contradiction to the libel, or menacing an action as the alternative. The letter which our legal advisers despatched was a gentlemanly and talented remonstrance, which soon brought the stupid Editors of the *Daily News* and the *Express* to reason. Bradbury and Evans, the proprietors of those threepenny prints, shook in their shoes at the idea of an action, they already having enough

hypocritical, according to circumstances, in its literary article—and wishy-washy in the extreme in its leader."

"Well, I am excessively obliged to you for this most useful warning," observed Mr. Bubbleton Styles. "You have nothing to say against the *Weekly Dispatch*—the *Sunday Times*—*Bell's Life in London*—"

"All good papers!" exclaimed the advertising agent. "But here is a list of those metropolitan and provincial journals in which I should recommend you to advertise."

"I place myself entirely in your hands," answered the promoter of the grandest railway scheme ever devised: and, thrusting his hands into his breeches pockets, he rattled a little silver and a great many halfpence, saying, "Shall I give you a hundred or so in advance? or will you send in the account—"

"Pray do not think of offering any sum in advance, Mr. Styles—my dear Mr. Styles! cried the agent. "It is but a trifle: three hundred guineas will cover the outlay for this first batch of advertisements—and I will send in my little account to the secretary when the Board meets."

"Very good," rejoined the promoter;—and, having come to this excellent understanding, the two gentlemen parted—Mr. Styles betaking himself to Garraway's Coffee-house, where he ate his lunch standing at the bar, and afterwards returning to his office at Crosby Hall Chambers.

law business on their hands in consequence of their treatment of Messrs. Powell and Wareing;—and, accordingly, the *News* and *Express* set off their own words, on Tuesday, Nov. 9th, in the following terms:—

"We have received a letter, protesting against Mrs. S. F. Reynolds's work of 'GREENA GREEN' being included in the list of popular works described as marked by 'looseness, warmth of colouring in criminal scenes, and the false glow cast around guilty indulgences.' We must admit that 'GREENA GREEN' does not merit this; and that, whatever its faults, it certainly contains nothing derogatory to the character or delicacy of a lady writer."

"Now let our readers mark well the atrocity of the proceeding on the part of the *News* and the *Express*. They first denounce 'GREENA GREEN' in the strongest terms: they are afterwards compelled, by the fear of law proceedings, to 'admit that 'GREENA GREEN' does not merit this,' and that 'It contains nothing derogatory to the character or delicacy of a lady writer.' Then how dared the wretched scribe to set such a miscreant's part as to accuse a lady of writing with 'looseness,' when he must have known the charge to be unfounded? He told a downright, deliberate, wilful lie: he has proclaimed himself, and likewise admitted himself to be, an abominable liar! And as such we denounce him."

"But of what value can criticisms of the *News* and *Express* be, when a contemptible scribe is thus allowed to make the columns of these prints the vehicle for his own beastly malignity? What authority can belong to a reviewer who is obliged to say on the 9th of November, 'I was guilty of a foul, cowardly, and unjustifiable calumny against a lady's character on the 2nd of November.' And these two papers belong to men who are so very particular that they turned off their sub-editors, Messrs. Powell and Wareing, because, forsooth, these gentlemen gave insertion to a particular bankruptcy case, which the bankrupt himself had written to implore Bradbury and Evans not to publish!"

"We hope the contemptible slanderer who 'does the criticisms' for the *News* and *Express* will treat his readers (two grown-up persons and a small boy for the *News*, and the small boy without the grown-up persons for the *Express*) with an account of the origin, progress, and present condition of those threepenny things. If so, he must state how the *News* first came out at fivepence with the intention of smashing every thing,—how Charles Dickens was the man entrusted with the obstetric process of introducing this

CHAPTER CXXX.

PERDITA.

A WEEK had elapsed since the arrival of Mrs. and Miss Fitzhardinge in the great metropolis; and as yet they appeared to be no nearer to an acquaintanceship with Charles Hatfield than they were on the day when they first beheld him issue from Lord Ellingham's mansion;—for that it was he whom they had seen on the occasion alluded to, the mother had satisfactorily ascertained.

Indeed, the old woman had not been idle. Every evening, for a couple of hours, did she watch in the immediate vicinity of the Earl's dwelling to obtain an interview with the young man: but he did not appear to go out after dusk.

Mrs. Fitzhardinge accordingly began to think of changing her tactics, and endeavouring to catch him in the day-time, when fortune at last favoured her views;—for on the eighth night of her loiterings in Pall Mall, she had the satisfaction of seeing him sally forth shortly after nine o'clock.

Unhesitatingly accosting him, she said, "Mr. Hatfield, will you accord me your attention for a few moments?"

The young man turned towards her, and beheld a very ugly, plainly-attired, old lady: he nevertheless answered her respectfully, because she had addressed him in a manner denoting genteel breeding. We

phenomenon to the world,—how froth was never so frothy, and vapouring never so vapoury, as when the bills, placards, and advertisements appeared,—and how the mountain at last brought forth a mouse! In fact, no failure was ever more miserable—more ludicrous—more contemptible than that of the *Daily News*. When a friend once spoke of his uppermost garment to Brummell, the 'exquisite,' laying his finger upon the collar thereof, said, 'Do you call this thing a coat?'—and when the *News* first came out, people held it up between the tips of their forefinger and thumb, and asked each other innocently, 'Do you call this thing a newspaper?' Well, after continuing remarkably sickly for some time, and seeing the utter folly of hoping to compete with the established daily newspapers, Bradbury and Evans—dear, kind, worthy souls!—said one morning to each other, 'This will never do: the public will not be gulled—we must really sell our wares at what they are worth;—and so down went the price of the *News* to twopenny-halfpenny! 'Hurrah for the cheap newspaper press!' vociferated they who now affect to look down with contempt on cheap literature altogether: and forthwith they fetch Mr. Dilk all the way from the *Athenæum* office in Wellington Street to manage their paper for them. And such management as it has been! Mr. Dilk knows about as much of newspapers in general as he does of courtesy in the *Athenæum* in particular;—and Bradbury and Evans very soon found that a twopenny-halfpenny daily thing was 'no go.' The price is accordingly raised to threepence; and, just to eke out by hook and by crook, the *Express* is issued as an evening paper, its contents being precisely those of the *News*, with perhaps half-a-dozen lines of new matter just to make a show under the head of 'Latest Intelligence.' Thus has the *Daily News* been tinkered about in all shapes and ways, with the hope of establishing it on some kind of basis or another;—and, after such a career, it fancies itself to be respectable and influential enough to undertake the duties of Mentor! But it has entrusted the office to a disgusting twaddler who scruples not to season his mawkish composition with diabolical lies, as a make-shift for 'Attie salt.' However, enough of this for the present;—we have compelled the *News* and the *Express* to acknowledge themselves to be slanderers;—but we are afraid that after all they have got the better of us, inasmuch as they probably provoked us only for the purpose of obtaining a gratuitous advertisement through the medium of any reply which might be made to them in THE MISCELLANY."—*Reynolds's Miscellany*, No. 56.

should observe, too, that she had purposely assumed a humble apparel on the occasion of these evening watchings, in order to avoid the chance of attracting the attention of passers-by or policemen, who would naturally have wondered to see a handsomely apparelled person thus loitering about.

"Certainly, madam," replied Charles: "I will listen to any thing you may have to say to me. Will you walk into the house which I have just left: 'tis the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham."

"I know well who lives there, Mr. Hatfield," answered the old woman; "and it is precisely because I wish to speak to you alone, that I have accosted you in the street. Can you pardon such boldness?"

"If your business with me be of importance, madam," said Charles, "no apology can be necessary on your part."

"Yes—my business is indeed of importance," returned Mrs. Fitzhardinge, with mysterious emphasis. "But I cannot speak to you here—"

"I have already requested you to accompany me to the house where I am residing with my relatives and friends," said Charles, with the least indication of impatience in his manner.

"And I have already assured you that I am anxious to converse with you alone," responded the old woman, nothing daunted. "Do not mistrust me, sir—do not suppose that I have accosted you for the purpose of soliciting any assistance of a pecuniary kind—"

"Then, madam, what do you require of me?" asked Charles, hastily.

"Ten minutes' private conversation—on matters of importance—of deep importance to yourself!" replied Mrs. Fitzhardinge, as rapidly and as firmly as the other had spoken: then, before he had time to make any rejoinder, she added, "For your own sake, Mr. Hatfield—if for no other consideration—you will accompany me to my own dwelling, which is close at hand. What! you hesitate? Then continue to cherish the secret grief which weighs upon your mind—"

"Ah! what did you say?" ejaculated the young man, starting as if a chord had been touched so as to vibrate to his very heart's core.

"I mean that if you refuse to accompany me, you will repent the loss of an opportunity to receive revelations nearly concerning yourself, and which opportunity may not speedily occur again."

As Mrs. Fitzhardinge uttered these words, she fixed a strange, mysterious, and almost ominous look upon Charles Hatfield, who was bewildered and amazed by her language. The old woman had dealt her random shots with good effect; and she experienced an inward triumph at her skill, and a sure conviction of its success.

"Who are you? and what do you know of me?" demanded Charles, breaking silence abruptly after more than a minute's pause, and speaking in a tone of earnestness denoting mingled suspense, wonder, and curiosity.

"My name is Fitzhardinge," replied the old woman; "and I know all—every thing concerning you,—aye, much more than you can possibly suspect. But not another word of explanation will I utter here; and you may now decide whether you will at once accompany me—"

"I will accompany you, madam," interrupted Charles Hatfield, in a decided manner. "In which direction does your abode lie?"

"Five minutes will take us thither," was the answer.

The old woman and the young gentleman now proceeded in silence towards Suffolk Street, Pall Mall—the latter reflecting what his companion might be what she could possibly have to communicate to him, and how he had acquired the information which she alleged to be so important and was about to impart. He naturally associated the promised revelations with the mysterious circumstances which he had so recently fathomed by means of the letters and manuscripts found in the secret recesses of the library at Lord Ellingham's mansion;—and yet he was at a loss to conceive how a Mrs. Fitzhardinge, whose name was entirely strange to him, could possibly have any connexion with his own family affairs. At one moment he fancied that the proceeding on her part was nothing more nor less than a plot to inveigle him to some den for predatory purposes: for he had heard that London abounded in such horrible places, and also in persons who adopted every kind of stratagem to lure the unwary into those fatal snares. But when he considered the quarter of the great metropolis in which his companion evidently resided, as she had assured him that her abode was only a few minutes' walk from the spot where she had first accosted him,—when he again noticed the respectability of her appearance, and reflected that there was something superior in her manners, language, and address,—and lastly, when he remembered that amidst circumstances so complicated and mysterious as those which regarded his own family, it was highly possible for that aged female to be interested in them in some way or another,—he blamed himself for his misgivings, and resolved to see the end of the adventure.

Scarcely was his mind thus made up, when Mrs. Fitzhardinge turned into Suffolk Street; and in less than another minute, she knocked in an authoritative manner at the door of a handsome house. The summons was instantaneously responded to by a respectable female-servant; and Charles Hatfield followed the old lady up a wide stair-case lighted by a lamp which a statue in a niche held in its hand. On reaching the first landing, Mrs. Fitzhardinge threw open a door, saying, "Walk into this room, Mr. Hatfield: I will join you in a few moments."

Charles entered—and the door immediately closed behind him.

The young man found himself in a well-furnished apartment, in which the light of the wax candles placed upon the mantel was reflected in a handsome mirror. The atmosphere was rendered perfumed and refreshing by vases of fresh flowers tastefully disposed around: and on a side-table stood a large globe filled with the clearest water, in which gold and silver fish were disporting. The curtains were closed over the windows; but still the room was cool and the air grateful in that sultry summer season.

These observations were made at a rapid glance;—and then Charles Hatfield's looks were concentrated in the cynosure which instantly absorbed all interest—all attention. For, half sitting, half reclining upon the sofa, was a being of such transcendent beauty that never in the wildest of his dreams had he conceived the like. When reading a novel or a poem, his imagination had often depicted to itself the semblance of the heroine—and this mental portraiture was invariably drawn with the utmost perfection of form and feature which impassioned and enthusiastic youth could devise. But no flight—no soaring of that fervid imagination had ever yet idealised such dazzling, brilliant charms as those which now met his astonished gaze.

—charms that intoxicated while they delighted, and that ravished while they infused a warm voluptuousness into the soul of the beholder.

And, in sooth, well might Charles Hatfield experience ineffable feelings and tender emotions as he contemplated the fiend in an angel's shape that was half reclining on the sofa; for Perdita was surpassingly lovely on this occasion! She was attired in a light pink muslin dress, made very low in the body, so that her neck and shoulders were set off in all their dazzling whiteness against the deep purple velvet of the sofa—and her full, swelling, firm bosom was more than half revealed. Her hair was arranged in long ringlets, glittering like hyperions, luxuriant, and sweeping those glowing globes that appeared to heave to their carresses. Her large grey eyes beamed with voluptuous languor, although a brilliant light shone in the depths of the dark pupils;—and her vermilion lips, parted with a smile, displayed the white and even rows of pearls, so faultless in their beauty. The slightly sun-burnt tinge of her face appeared to be the rich hue of an Italian complexion—the carnation glow of health, and youth, and warm blood animating her cheeks. Then her arms were naked,—those arms which were dazzlingly white, robust, and yet admirably modelled, and which seemed ready to stretch out and clasp a favoured lover to the panting breast. One foot was raised on the sofa—the other rested on an ottoman;—and thus, as Charles Hatfield's eyes swept the rich and fine proportions—the undulating contours of that splendid form, it seemed to him as if a halo of voluptuousness surrounded this enchanting being—a very perfume of beauty enveloped her in its intoxicating influence.

She had heard him ascending the stairs—and she had purposely placed herself in an attitude which should seem as if he had disturbed her unexpectedly, and thus serve as an apology for the negligent abandonment of limb which gave to her position an air alike wanton and lascivious. While she, therefore, affected to gaze on him in soft surprise, he was intently devouring her with looks of unfeigned amazement;—and while she still retained that voluptuous attitude as if unwittingly, he was rivetted to the spot near the door where he had stopped short on first catching sight of her. This dumb-show on the part of both,—artificial with her, and real with him,—lasted for nearly a minute;—and during that time Perdita had an opportunity of surveying the young man's handsome appearance with even more searching scrutiny than when she had seen him in Pall Mall the very day of her arrival in London,—while, on his side, Charles Hatfield had leisure to scan a combination of charms such as transcended all his ideal creations, and which, had he beheld them in a picture, he would have declared to be impossible of realization.

Again must we observe how different was this elegantly-attired, captivating creature as she now appeared, from the ragged, way-worn wanderer that she was when first we introduced her to our readers! But oh! dangerous—trebly dangerous Perdita,—a snake with the loveliest skin—a demon with the most heavenly form—utter profligacy in the most witching guise!

And now the young man, who has been brought within the sphere of this perilous influence, recovers his self-possession so far as to be able to stammer forth an apology for what he conceives to be an intrusion occasioned by some strange mistake.

'No excuse is necessary, sir,' replies Perdita. "the

lady whom you state to have conducted you hither, is my mother; and she has doubtless sought her chamber for a few minutes to change her attire. Pray be seated."

But Charles Hatfield once more stood still—rivetted to the spot, after having advanced a few paces towards Perdita;—for the sound of her voice, so sweetly musical—so enchantingly harmonious, appeared to inspire him with ecstatic emotions and infuse an ineffable delight into his very soul.

Then Perdita arose from the sofa, and indicating a chair close by, again invited the young man to be seated,—accomplishing this courtesy with so ravishing a grace and such a charming smile, that he felt himself intoxicated—bewildered—enchanted by the magic of her beauty, the melody of her silver tones, and the soft persuasion of her manner. For the consciousness of almost superhuman beauty had rendered Perdita emulative of every art and taught her to study every movement which might invest her with a winning way and a witching power;—and thus this singular young woman had acquired a politeness so complete that it seemed intuitive, and a polish so refined that it appeared to have been gained by long and unvaried association with the highest classes.

Sinking into the chair thus gracefully offered him, Charles Hatfield could not take his eyes off the magnificent creature who remained standing for a few seconds after he was seated; for, affecting to alter the position of one of the wax candles on the mantel, as if it were too near the mirror, she placed herself in such an attitude that the young man might obtain a perfect view of the flowing outlines of her glorious form,—the splendid arching of the swan-like neck—the luxurious fullness of the bust—the tapering slenderness of the waist—the plump and rounded arms—the large, projecting hips—and the finely proportioned feet and ankles.

The effect thus produced by the artful, designing creature, whose voluptuous position seemed all natural and all unstudied, was precisely that which she had intended;—for Charles Hatfield experienced a delirium of emotions till then unknown—and he felt that he could almost spring from his seat, catch that bewitching form in his arms, and, covering her with kisses, exclaim, "Pardon me—but I am mad—intoxicated—raving with passion!"

"My mother will not be many minutes, sir," said Perdita, now returning to her seat upon the sofa; "and in the meantime I must solicit you to exercise your patience—for I am afraid you will find me but a dull companion."

"Impossible!" cried Charles, enthusiastically: then fearing that he had spoken in too decided and earnest a manner to one who was a perfect stranger, he added in a more subdued and reserved tone, "But perhaps I am intruding on your privacy, as I am afraid that when I entered—I mean, I fear that I—I disturbed you—"

"I certainly was not aware that my mother expected a visitor this evening," answered Perdita; "and it is I who should apologise, inasmuch as you caught me in such a lounging, lazy attitude. But since I have been in London I have experienced a heaviness in the atmosphere that engenders indolence—for I have hitherto been accustomed to the country."

"Then you have not long resided in London, Miss Fitzhardinge?" said Charles, hazarding this mode of address with the determination of ascertaining whether the beautiful young woman were married or single.

"We have only been in this city for one week," she replied in an acquiescent way which convinced him that she had not changed the parental name by means of wedlock—a discovery that infused a secret glow of pleasure into his very soul, though at the same instant his heart smote him as if he were already playing a treacherous part in respect to Lady Frances Ellingham. "No," continued Perdita, "we have not long resided in London. Urgent affairs have compelled my mother to visit the capital; and as our stay is likely to be of considerable duration, we are about to take a house. For my part, I am not sorry that we are thus to settle in London: for, in spite of its oppressive atmosphere, its smoke, and its noise, it has many attractions."

"You have already seen enough, then, to induce you to prefer London to the country, Miss Fitzhardinge?" said Charles, now admiring the fine aquiline profile of which he was suffered to obtain a perfect view, as Perdita half averted her looks on purpose, though quite in a natural manner.

"I have seen enough to render me an enthusiastic admirer of your great city," she replied, now turning her full countenance upon him, and smiling so as to display her brilliant teeth: "but I am anxious to behold more, and my wish cannot very readily be gratified. For, save our attorney, we have no acquaintances—no friends in London: we are perfect strangers here—and we cannot very well ask our solicitor to escort us to the theatre and to those places of amusement which ladies would hardly choose to visit unless accompanied and protected by a gentleman."

"Is it possible that *you*, Miss Fitzhardinge, should have to experience the want of such a *chaperon*?" demanded Charles Hatfield, again hurried by his enthusiasm into language too little reserved and distant for a perfect stranger to address to a young lady:—at least, so he thought and feared immediately after he had made the observation.

"It is very possible," replied Perdita, in a mild and almost plaintive tone. "In the country we had numerous friends; but here——"

And the artful creature, stopping short, stooped down to pick up her handkerchief as if to apply it to her eyes:—at the same instant Charles, obeying the impulse of polite attention, bent down also to save the lady the trouble and perform the little act of courtesy, when their hair—their very cheeks came in contact,—accidentally as the confused and bewildered Charles imagined, but intentionally on the part of the wanton and astute Perdita.

And that contact—Oh! it was thrilling in the extreme; and Charles Hatfield felt as if his veins ran with liquid fire;—for the perfume exhaled from the lady's hair—the velvety feeling of the luxuriant curls—the softness and the warmth of her carnation cheek—and then the view which he could not possibly avoid for a moment obtaining of the glowing breast which her stooping posture completely revealed,—all this was sufficient to madden him with passion and excite him to a degree when all self-command becomes nearly impossible. But he still possessed a sufficiency of mental energy to controul himself; and, stammering forth an awkward apology, he hurriedly observed, "Would you not think me too bold, Miss Fitzhardinge, I should be proud to offer my services as a *chaperon* to yourself—and your mother," he added, for decency's sake.

The instant this offer was made,—made without the least forethought and in the confusion of the young

man's mind arising from the incidents just related,—he repented of his rashness: he would have given worlds to be able to recall the proposal. For, in a moment to his mind flashed the image of the lovely Lady Frances Ellingham—the reflection that he was offering his attentions to a young person totally unknown to him—the remembrance that he had many matters of importance to occupy his leisure—and the general impression that he had committed himself in a most singularly foolish and inconsiderate manner.

Perdita saw what was passing in his mind: at least, she perceived that he repented of the proposal which he had so precipitately made, and which it had rejoiced her so much to receive;—and she resolved to conquer his scruples—overcome his repugnance—and confirm him in the act of vassalage to which her transcendent charms and her wanton arts had already prompted him.

Laying her soft warm hand upon his, and approaching her countenance so near to his own that her fragrant breath fanned his cheek, she said, in a tone apparently of deep emotion, "Mr. Hatfield, this proposal is so generous—so kind—so unexpected, that I know not how to answer you otherwise than by expressing my sincere gratitude. And yet—so frankly have you made the offer, that it would be a miserable affectation on my part to hesitate or to appear less candid and open in accepting it. I do therefore accept it, my dear sir—and with renewed thanks. And think not that in constituting yourself the friend—for in such a light must I henceforth consider you—of Miss Fitzhardinge, you are doing aught derogatory to yourself. No: for my mother is descended from an old and illustrious family,—a family which has enumerated amongst its members personages of rank, eminence, and renown;—and should the Chancery suit which she has come to London to prosecute, result favourably to her, she will recover an enormous fortune that has been accumulating for years through remaining in a dormant state."

While Perdita was delivering this tissue of falsehoods with an air of the most profound sincerity, she still kept her hand upon that of the young man—still retained her countenance near his own—and likewise fixed upon him looks at once languishing, tender, and voluptuous.

Again did he lose all power of sober reflection; and, completely yielding to the influence which the siren had in so short a time gained over him, he said, "I shall be proud and delighted to act as your escort, Miss Fitzhardinge. But you just now addressed me by my name—and yet I thought you were unprepared for my presence here this evening."

"I was well aware that my mother wished to see you on particular business," said Perdita, having a ready reply for every question that might be put to her; "and therefore when I saw you enter the room, I concluded that you must be Mr. Charles Hatfield."

"And are you acquainted with the nature of the business concerning which Mrs. Fitzhardinge desired to speak with me?" inquired the young man, wondering why the old lady did not make her appearance.

"Yes—I am well informed on that subject," returned Perdita; "but pray do not ask me to talk to you on business! I detest the very name! And now perhaps you will consider me a silly—flighty—volatile creature——"

"I consider you to be an angel of beauty!" exclaimed Charles, unable to restrain the raptures which hurried him on to this impassioned ejaculation

"I was told before I came to London that the gentlemen of the great metropolis were very fond of paying silly young ladies vain and empty compliments," said Perdita, looking with good-humoured archness at her companion, while her eyes beamed with wickedness and her bosom heaved visibly.

"Is it the first time that you have been assured of your beauty?" asked Charles, still carried away by an uncontrollable influence.

"No—not precisely the first," responded Perdita, with a *naïveté* so admirably assumed that her companion believed it to be completely genuine. "There was a young gentleman—or rather a nobleman, but I must not mention his name—in the country, who offered me his hand;—and he paid me many very fine compliments."

"And you accepted the proposal? you are engaged to him?" exclaimed Charles, with a strange fluttering of the heart.

"Neither the one nor the other," answered Perdita.

"I could not love him—and therefore I declined the honour. My mother was angry with me, and talked a great deal about the excellence of the match and so forth: but I was obstinate—yes, very obstinate, Mr. Hatfield," she said archly; "for never—never," she continued, her tone suddenly becoming earnest and her manner serious,—“never could I bestow my hand where I cannot likewise give my heart!”

"And you have resolved wisely, Miss Fitzhardinge!" exclaimed Charles. "Matrimony without sincere affection can afford no promise of happiness. But one so beautiful as yourself—impressed too with such sterling sentiments and harbouring such pure principles—oh, you will prove indeed a treasure to the man who is fortunate enough to secure your heart and hand!"

"Again you compliment me, Mr. Hatfield," said Perdita, looking down and blushing,—for even her very blushes she could command at pleasure. "In reference, however, to the observation you have just made, I should remark that I have never yet met with one of your sex whom I could comprehend fully and who could understand me. I admire openness, candour and sincerity,—that generous frankness, too, which at once establishes friendship and dissipates cold formality. For I believe that the trammels of ceremonial politeness positively spoil the heart,—tutoring it to curb its enthusiasm where enthusiasm would be so natural! I know not how to express myself clearly; but what I mean to imply is this—that I am a believer in the possibility of friendship at first sight——"

"And of love at first sight also?" exclaimed Charles Hatfield, in an impassioned tone.

"Yes—and of love at first sight also," repeated Perdita, again hanging down her head—again commanding a deep blush—and likewise speaking in a low, melting tone of deep emotion, as she drew a long sigh.

"Was it that possibility of experiencing the feeling of friendship at first sight, which led you to accept my proposed services as an escort to the places of public amusement?" enquired Charles.

"Wherefore do you seek thus to probe the secret feelings of my soul?" asked Perdita, turning upon him a look indicative of mingled pleasure and amazement.

"Have I offended you by the question, charming lady?" exclaimed Charles.

"Oh! I do not so readily take offence, Mr. Hatfield,"

cried Perdita. "But—frank, candid, as I beg to be—though I believe myself to be—I still have my little feelings of pride, and I could not think of making an avowal to a gentleman otherwise than as a compliment."

"Then were I to declare sincerely and solemnly—and on my honour as a man—that it was a sentiment of friendship, excited in me at first sight and according to your own doctrine, which prompted me to offer my services as a *chaperon*," said Charles, hastily and enthusiastically, "would you deign to answer my question?"

"Such a declaration on your part, sir, would necessarily elicit—nay, demand some kind of a response on mine," returned the artful beauty, looking down, and tapping the carpet with her foot in such a manner that her ankle peeped from beneath her dress, and the young man's eyes could catch a glimpse of the exquisitely white skin through the net work of the dainty silk stocking.

Charles hesitated: an avowal of friendship trembled on his tongue—but he thought how dangerous such a confession would be—he thought, too, of Lady Frances Ellingham!

And Perdita again perceived that he hesitated; and instantly had recourse to a new artifice to display her charms to their utmost advantage. Stooping down, she affected to arrange the ottoman in the most convenient manner for her feet;—but, in this attitude which seemed so natural, ingenuous, and artless, she revealed so much of the treasures of her bosom that no room was left for imaginings—and Charles Hatfield felt himself seized with a delirium in which he would have made over his soul to Satan had such been the price demanded for the possession of Perdita.

"Miss Fitzhardinge," he said, his voice almost subdued and his tongue parched through the maddening fierceness of passion, "on my honour as a gentleman, I swear that the offer I ere now made you was dictated by a feeling of friendship! Yes—of a friendship that sprang up in my soul in a single instant—that took birth in a moment—a friendship that prompted me to declare how proud and delighted I should be to act as your escort! For I am candid, frank, and ingenuous as I perceive you to be,—and I will give you another proof of the existence of these qualities in respect to myself—even at the risk of offending you. From the first moment that I set foot in this room until now, I have experienced emotions such as I never felt before. In my delirium I apostrophised you as an angel of beauty;—and an angel of beauty must you indeed be to exercise such prompt—such speedy—such witching influence as that which has enthralled me. For it appears as if there were a spell upon me—an enchantment, from which there is no escape. Sweet lady, pardon me for having spoken thus frankly——"

"I again assure you that I do not very readily take offence," answered Perdita: then, laying her hand upon his—for the designing woman sought to excite him almost to madness—and again approaching her countenance so near his own that he could look into the depth of her large, wanton eyes,—she said, "You have made a certain avowal, and you have a right to expect a candid and unreserved reply from me. Then learn, Mr. Hatfield, that never should I have accepted your services as a *chaperon*—never should we have talked thus familiarly—never would you have been suffered to read so much of my disposition as within the last hour you have learnt—had I not I likewise

experienced a feeling of friendship at first sight for you!"

"Oh! my God—this is happiness so un hoped—so unlooked for—so unexpected, that I am bewildered—dazzled—amazed!" murmured the young man, a mist obscuring his brain—and yet a glorious, lustrous, golden mist through which he seemed to catch glimpses of paradise. "Friendship did you say, charming lady? Yet is not friendship a dangerous word for lips like ours to breathe—and a dangerous sentiment for hearts like ours to feel?"

"You speak as if you were under an apprehension that you are doing wrong?" said Perdita, in a tone of soft reproach. "Oh! is this candour and frankness? If you regret that you have pledged me your friendship—for such I augur of your words—I release you, Mr. Hatfield, from the bond: nay—I should be too proud to ask you to adhere to it!"

And now the young man beheld the fascinating woman in a new phasis of her charms;—for, with that ready versatility of aspect and demeanour which she had so completely at her command, she suddenly invested herself with all the majesty of sublime haughtiness;—no longer melting, tender, wanton, and voluptuous as Venus—but terrible, domineering, superb, and imperious as Juno,—no longer wearing the cestus of the Goddess of Love—but grasping, as the Queen of Heaven, the thunders of Olympian Jove.

Her eyes flashed fire—her cheeks flushed—her nostrils dilated—her lip curled—her neck arched proudly rather than gracefully—her bosom heaved as if it would burst the low corsage which only half restrained it—and her very form seemed to draw itself up into a height, which, even as she sat and of middling stature as she was, appeared colossal at that moment to the astounded gaze of the young man.

Never was artifice more successful—never was triumph more complete, on one side;—never was defeat more signal—never was humiliation more contrite, on the other. For, overwhelmed as it were by the sovereign majesty of that anger which he believed himself to have provoked, Charles Hatfield fell upon his knees before the haughty beauty, and seizing both her hands in his, he extravagantly devoured them with kisses, exclaiming, "Pardon—pardon!"

"Yes—yes: it is as frankly accorded as sincerely demanded!" exclaimed Perdita, not offering to withdraw her hands from the lips which were now glued to them: and in an instant her whole manner and appearance changed again—and when Charles Hatfield ventured to look up into the syren's face, he saw her bending over him with cheeks flushed it is true, but not by anger—and with eyes that seemed to swim in wanton, liquid langour.

Rising from his suppliant posture, and now taking a seat by the side of Perdita on the sofa,—relinquishing her hands at the same time, for fear of giving offence by retaining them,—the infatuated young man, drunk with passion, said in a low murmuring tone, "We have not been acquainted more than one hour, and we have exchanged vows of friendship—is it not so?"

"Yes—if you do not repent now, and never will repent of that pledge on your part," answered the dangerous young woman, who thus conducted her designing machinations with such consummate skill.

No—never, never!" cried Hatfield. "And now we know each other as well as if we had been intimate since our infancy! To you, then, henceforth I am Charles; and you are to me——"

"Perdita," said she.

"Oh! beautiful—singular—and yet ominous name!" exclaimed the young gentleman. "Yes—you are my friend—my dear friend Perdita! And now, Perdita, I will avail myself of this romantic yet not the less sincere friendship that is established between us, to ask you what caprice or fancy gave you so remarkable a Christian name?"

"Because in my infancy—shortly after my birth, and before I was baptised—I was lost,—or rather stolen by gipsies," answered Perdita, investing herself and her history with as much of the charm of mysticism as possible: "and when I was recovered from the kidnappers by my parents, they christened me Perdita—or THE LOST ONE."

"Every thing connected with you seems to be imbued with deep and enthralling interest, my dear friend," said Charles: "a supernatural halo appears to surround you! Your beauty is of a nature so superior to aught of female loveliness that I ever before beheld—your voice has something so indescribably melting and musical that it awakens echoes in the inmost recesses of the soul—your history is strange, wild, and impressive in its very commencement—your disposition is characterised by a frankness and candour so generous that it inspires and reciprocates profound friendship the instant it meets a kindred spirit—and then there is about you a something so witching, so captivating, so enchanting, that the best and most virtuous of men would lose all sense of duty, did you—sweet syren that you are—undertake to lead them astray."

"If I have indeed found a kindred spirit in you, Charles," said Perdita, taking his hand and pressing it as if in grateful and innocent rapture to her heaving bosom—an act which only tended to inflame the young man almost to madness,—“I shall have gained that which I have long sought, and never yet found. For my heart has hitherto been as complete a stranger to a sincere friendship as to love! When I spoke ere now of our friends in the country, I meant those acquaintances whom custom denominates by the other title."

"Perdita—my friend Perdita, the amity that we have pledged each other shall be eternal!" exclaimed Charles, in an impassioned tone.

"And you will return to visit me to-morrow?" said the young woman, her fine grey eyes beaming with an unsettled lustre, as if the mingled voluptuousness of day and night met in those splendid, eloquent orbs.

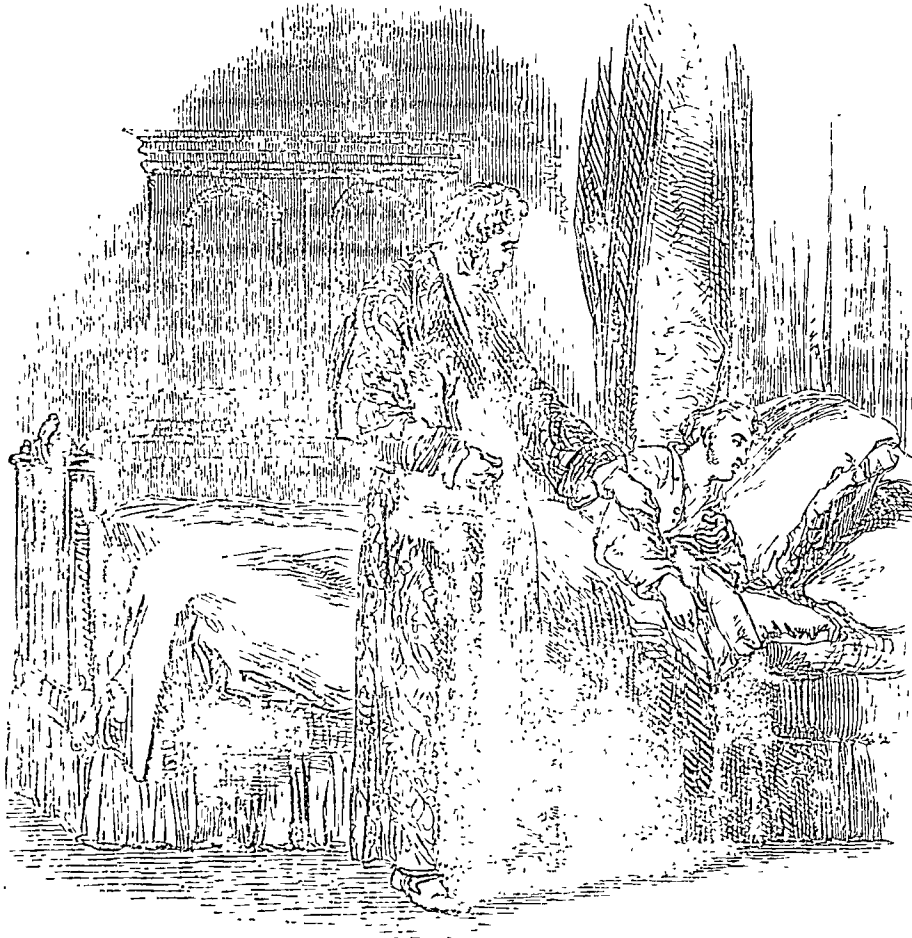
"Yes—oh! yes!" cried Charles, as if it were unnecessary to have asked the question. "And now I shall leave you, Perdita: I shall depart to feast my imagination on the pleasures of this interview."

Thus speaking, the young man pressed Perdita's hand to his lips, and hurried from the room, intoxicated with a delirium of bliss, and scarcely conscious of where he was or whither he was going.

CHAPTER CXXXI.

THE SYREN'S ARTS AND CHARMS.

ON gaining the street, Charles Hatfield hurried along like one demented,—positively reeling with the influence which Perdita's charms, allurements, and arts had shed upon him,—and feeling within his soul a glow of such ineffable happiness that he appeared to have been snatched from the world and wafted to



Elysium. Had he just quitted a banquet where his head had been pillowed on the bosom of beauty, and the fair hands of the charmer had held to his lips brimming goblets of champagne of which he had drunk deeply, he would not have experienced a more extraordinary degree of excitement, nor such felicitous sensations.

But the moment of reaction came; and though the revulsion was slow, yet it was powerful—and even painful.

He had found his way into Saint James's Park; and hurrying to the most secluded quarter, he was still giving rein to the luxuriousness of his thoughts, when it suddenly flashed to his mind that he had not received from the lips of Mrs. Fitzhardinge the important communications which she had promised him. Indeed, he had not seen her again from the moment when she showed him into the drawing-room where he had found the lovely creature to whom his friendship—his eternal friendship was so solemnly plighted.

Striking his repeater,—for obscurity reigned in that portion of the park where he now was, and he could not see the position of the hands of his watch,—he was amazed to discover that his interview with Perdita had lasted two hours.

Two hours!—and it scarcely seemed to have occupied ten minutes!

But now his reasoning faculties returned;—and he began to ask himself innumerable questions.

“Wherefore was I conducted to that house? was it really to receive important revelations from the mother? or only to be thrown into the way of the daughter? Why did not the mother make her appearance once during those two hours which I passed with the daughter? Was it a stratagem devised by designing women to ensnare me? or was Mrs. Fitzhardinge unexpectedly prevented from joining us so soon as she had intended? My God! I am bewildered—I know not what to think! For if they be women of evil repute and having sinister aims in view, Perdita would not have given me to understand that they are at ease in their circumstances, and hope to be even rich very shortly? But that young creature—so beautiful,—so indescribably—so enchantingly beautiful,—what object could she have in pledging her friendship to me—to me, a stranger whom she had never seen before? Fool that I am! wherefore did I give a similar promise to her? Oh! it was in a moment of ecstacy—of enchantment—of intoxication;—and might it not also have been the same with her?”

Ah! that belief would denote a boundless vanity on my part;—and yet women have their sudden caprices—their instantaneous attachments, as well as men! Yes—it must be so—Perdita loves me!—she loves me—and I already love her deeply—madly, in return!”

But scarcely had these thoughts passed through his brain, when his heart smote him painfully—severely,—reproaching him with his treachery towards Lady Frances Ellingham, and suggesting a comparison between the retiring, bashful beauty of this charming young creature, and the warm, impassioned, bold loveliness of the syren Perdita.

The more Charles Hatfield pondered upon the strange scene that had taken place in Suffolk Street, the less satisfied did he feel with himself. He saw that his conduct had been rash, precipitate, and thoughtless;—and yet there was something so pleasurable in what he blamed himself for, that he was not altogether contrite. Indeed, he felt—he admitted to his own secret soul, that had he the power of recalling the last two hours, he should act precisely in the same manner over again. For when he thought of Perdita,—remembered her witcheries—dwelt on her faultless charms—and recalled to mind the mystic fascination of her language and the delicious tones of her voice,—his imagination grew inflamed—his blood ran rapidly and hotly in his veins—and it seemed that were she Satan in female shape, he could sell his soul to her!

It was late when he returned to Ellingham House; and he repaired at once to his chamber. But he could not sleep: the image of Perdita haunted him;—and were it not so unseasonable an hour he would have returned to Suffolk Street under pretence of soliciting the promised revelations from Mrs. Fitzhardinge.

When he retired to rest, and sleep did at last visit his eyes, that beautiful image followed him in his dreams. He thought that he was seated by the side of the witching fair one on the sofa, and that she was reclining, half-embraced, on his breast, with her countenance, flushed and wanton in expression, upturned towards his own. This delicious position appeared to last for a long—long time, neither uttering a word, but drinking deep draughts of love from each other's eyes. Then he fancied that he stooped to press his lips to her delicious mouth;—but at that instant the lovely face changed—elongating, and undergoing so horrible a transformation that his eyes were fixed in appalling fascination upon it,—while, at the same time, he became sensible that the soft and supple form which he held in his arms was undergoing a rapid and signal change likewise,—till the whole being, lately so charming, so tender, and so loving, was changed into a hideous serpent. A terrible cry escaped him—and he awoke!

The rays of the gorgeous sun were streaming in at the window, as Charles Hatfield started from his slumber; and, to his surprise, he found his father standing by the side of the bed.

“You have been labouring under the influence of an unpleasant dream, Charles,” said Mr. Hatfield, taking his son's hand.

“Yes—'t was indeed a hideous dream!” exclaimed the young man, shuddering at the idea which still pursued him.

“And was that dream a reflex of any thoughts which occupy you when awake?” asked his father, in a kind and anxious tone.

Charles surveyed his parent with astonishment, and then became absolutely crimson in the face;—for this

early and unusual visit seemed to imply that its object was in some way connected with matters that had lately been occupying, as the reader knows, no inconsiderable share of the young man's reflections—we mean, the family secrets into which he had so strangely penetrated.

“Yes, Charles,” continued Mr. Hatfield; “I feared that you had something upon your mind; and your manner now confirms that apprehension. For the last week you have not been the same gay, happy, lively being you so lately were;—and, although you have endeavoured to conceal your sorrow from observation, yet it has not escaped the eyes of your affectionate mother and myself. Tell me, Charles—tell me candidly, I implore you—is it in consequence of the discovery that we are your parents, and not mere relatives—?”

“Oh! my dear father,” exclaimed the young man, “that discovery made me happy, I solemnly assure you!”

“Then wherefore are you melancholy and thoughtful at times?” asked Mr. Hatfield, in a tone of deep interest.

“Melancholy and thoughtful!” repeated Charles, mechanically.

“Yes, my dear son: and even at this moment—?”

“Even at this moment,” still repeated Charles, whose imagination was wandering to Suffolk Street, the influence of his dream having been to fill his soul with a more profound terror than he had ever before experienced from the worst of sleep's delusions.

“Yes—even at this moment you are abstracted—your ideas are unsettled—and there is a wildness in your looks which terrifies me!” cried Mr. Hatfield, speaking with strong emphasis and in an earnest manner. “Charles! again I implore you to tell me the cause of this change which has so lately come over you!”

“Dear father, why will you press me on the subject?” cried the young man, now brought to himself, yet knowing not how to reply. “Oh! believe me—believe me, it will be better for us both that you do not persist in questioning me!”

“On the contrary, Charles,” returned Mr. Hatfield, speaking more seriously and firmly than before, “it will be far more satisfactory to me—yes, and to your mother also—to be made the depositors of your secret cares. You have assured me that you are not unhappy on account of the discovery made on the day when the Prince of Montoni was received at Court; and therefore I must conjecture the existence of some other cause of grief. Charles, my dear boy,” added his father, gazing steadfastly upon him, “you love Lady Frances—and you are fearful of avowing your passion?”

The young man had expected that his father was about to speak on some of those family matters into the mysterious depths of which he had penetrated; and, therefore, when Mr. Hatfield addressed to him that species of interrogative accusation, Charles experienced a relief which betrayed itself as well in the brightening up of his countenance as in the surprise wherewith he regarded his parent.

“Ah! now I have penetrated your secret!” cried the latter: then, wringing his son's hand, he said impressively, “Fear nothing—but hope every thing, Charles;—and if you have reason to believe that Lady Frances reciprocates your attachment, hesitate not to offer her your hand.”

With these words, Mr. Hatfield hurried from the

room, leaving his son amazed and bewildered at the turn which the scene had so unexpectedly taken.

"Yes," exclaimed the young man aloud, after a long pause, during which he reflected profoundly alike on his fearful dream and his father's suggestion; "I will banish Perdita from my memory—for that vision was a providential warning! The most deadly serpents often wear the most beautiful skins;—and Perdita—the syren Perdita—has secret ends of her own to serve in thus throwing her silken chains round me. There is mischief in her fascination:—the honey of her lips will turn to gall and bitterness in the mouth of him who presses them! And Frances—my charming cousin Frances, who knows not that she is thus related to me,—sweet Lady Frances is endowed with every quality calculated to ensure my happiness. Yes—I will adopt my father's counsel: I will secure the hand of this amiable girl! Then, although I must sooner or later compel my sire to wrest the earldom from his younger brother, the blow will fall the less severely on the latter, inasmuch as his daughter will become a Viscountess in espousing me, and a Countess at my father's death!"

Thus reasoned Charles Hatfield, as he performed the duties of the toilette; and when he descended to the breakfast-parlour, there was so fine a glow of animation on his countenance, and so much happiness in his bright eyes, that his parents were rejoiced to mark the change. They did not, however, make any audible observation on the subject; but the rapid and significant glances which they dealt at each other, expressed the delight that filled their souls.

Lady Frances looked more than usually beautiful and interesting on this occasion: at least so thought Charles Hatfield, as, seating himself by her side, he ministered to her the attentions of the breakfast table.

The conversation turned upon an important event which was to take place in the evening—the Prince of Montoni having accepted the Earl of Ellingham's invitation to a banquet at the lordly mansion in Pall Mall. It was resolved, in order to render befitting honour to the illustrious guest, that the entertainment should be of the most sumptuous description; and no expense was to be spared on the occasion. A select number of the noble Earl's acquaintances were invited; and these were chosen not on account of great names and sounding titles,—but on the score of personal merit and consideration.

Soon after breakfast Charles Hatfield and Lady Frances found themselves alone together in the apartment; and the young maiden, approaching her companion, said in her artless, fascinating manner, "I am delighted to see that you have recovered your natural gaiety. Do you know, Mr. Charles, that you have latterly been most desperately moody and reserved?"

"Not towards you, I hope, dear Fanny," he replied. "Not for worlds," he added emphatically, "would I give you cause to think ill of me."

"As for thinking ill of you, Charles," she observed, "that would be impossible! But may I not seek to know the reasons of your late unhappiness?"

"Let us not discourse upon the past, Fanny," said the young man, earnestly. "I am happy now, at all events—happier, too, than ever, because I perceive that my welfare is not altogether indifferent to you."

"Far from it," observed Lady Frances, with the ingenuous emphasis of her extreme artlessness. "Do we not live beneath the same roof?—are we not friends?—are not our parents very dear friends to each other?"

—and is it not therefore natural that I should feel interested in all that concerns your happiness?"

"Adorable creature!" exclaimed Charles, as he drew a rapid contrast between the charming *naïveté* of the beautiful Lady Frances and the forward, bold manner of the voluptuously lovely Perdita: then, taking his cousin's hand, and gazing tenderly upon her innocent countenance, he said, "Fanny, were our parents to sanction our marriage, would you consent to be mine?"

Lady Frances withdrew her hand hastily; and, blushing deeply, she gazed for a few seconds in the most unfeigned surprise on her companion.

"You are not offended with me?" asked Charles.

"I had hoped—I had flattered myself—"

"No—I am not offended with you," returned Fanny, now casting down her eyes and blushing even more deeply than before: "but I fear—I tremble lest I am doing wrong thus to listen to you—"

"A virtuous affection is no crime," said the young man, hastily. "And now, my dearest Frances, if you feel that you can love me, I will at once declare to your noble parents the attachment—the deep attachment which I experience towards you."

"Whatever my father and mother counsel, will become a law for me," answered Lady Frances, in a low and tremulous tone, which convinced the suitor that he was not indifferent to her.

Charles pressed her hand to his lips, and hurried from the room with the intention of immediately seeking the Earl of Ellingham; but in the passage he encountered a domestic who gave him a note which had just been left by a messenger. The address was in an elegant female hand; and the word "Private" was written in the corner. Charles hastened to his own apartment, and read the note, the contents of which ran as follow:—

"MY DEAREST FRIEND,—Before you see my mother again, I must have a few words with you in private. She is compelled to visit her solicitor at mid-day, and will be absent for at least two hours. I shall expect you as soon after twelve as possible.

"PERDITA FITZHARDINGE."

"No—I will not accept the invitation!" exclaimed the young man, aloud: then, gazing again at the note, he murmured, "What a charming hand-writing—and how beautiful does her mystic and romantic name appear upon paper! *Perdita*!—'t is a name which possesses an irresistible attraction! But—oh! that dream! And yet it was but a dream;—and a very silly dream, the more I contemplate it. Heavenly warnings are not sent by such means; and Lady Frances might as well have been the subject of the vision as Perdita. What can she require with me? She must have a few words with me in private before I see her mother again. Then her mother expects and intends to have an interview with me—and she must therefore have certain communications to make, after all. This does not appear like delusion nor trickery:—no—the old lady really has matters of import to discuss with me;—and I should be wrong—I should perhaps be criminally neglectful of my own interests, were I not to hear whatever she may have to state. And, Perdita—it would be at least rude and ungentlemanly on my part not to attend to this missive, the nature of which appears to be urgent. Yes—I will call on Perdita: 't is already verging close upon mid-day—and there is no time to be lost. But—after all that has passed between dear Frances and myself this morning—I shall be as distant and reserved as politeness

ness will admit: I shall arm myself against the fascinations of the syren;—and if she offer to release me from the pledge of friendship so inconsiderately given, I shall not fail to accept with joy the proposed emancipation."

But, before he repaired to Suffolk Street, did he not seek his father to communicate to him the important fact that he had duly followed his counsel and solicited the hand of Lady Frances?—or did he not obtain an interview with the Earl and acquaint him with the nature of the conversation which had taken place between himself and that nobleman's daughter?

Alas! no:—for it was close upon twelve when the young man received Perdita's note;—and he thought that it did not precisely signify for an hour or two when he might make those statements; whereas it was necessary to see the syren without delay.

Thus reasoned Charles Hatfield to himself;—and the reader will agree with us in deciding that the necessity which constituted the excuse for his conduct, was not quite so urgent as he chose to fancy it.

Moreover,—since Charles Hatfield resolved to appear as reserved and formal as he well might be, towards Perdita,—it was assuredly strange that he should devote more than usual attention to his toilette, arranging his hair in the most becoming style, and surveying with inward satisfaction his very handsome countenance in the mirror.

The clock struck twelve as he quitted the house;—and it was impossible to conceal from himself the fact that he was rejoiced at having an excuse to call upon Perdita.

Then, as he proceeded with some degree of rapidity towards Suffolk Street, he could not possibly prevent his imagination from indulging in exciting conjectures how Perdita would be dressed—how she would look by day-light—and now he would receive him when she observed his studied coolness and his constraint of manner.

"Poor girl!" he murmured to himself: "if she really hoped to find a sincere friend in me, how will she bear the disappointment which is in store for her? It grieves me—Oh! it grieves me to be compelled to inflict a wound upon her gentle heart; but duty—yes, my duty towards Lady Frances leaves me no alternative."

With a beating heart he knocked at the door;—and in less than a minute he was conducted to the drawing-room, where Perdita was waiting to receive him.

The young lady was dressed in an elegant morning wrapper; and, the weather being intensely hot, the ribbands which should have fastened it round her neck, were left untied, so that it remained open at the bosom. Her hair was arranged in bands, and she wore a cap of the slightest material, but the snowy whiteness of which enhanced the glossy richness of those luxuriant masses that crowned her fine forehead. Her large grey eyes, with their dark pupils, were as bright and lustrous as on the preceding evening; and the noon-day sun detracted not from the exquisite whiteness of the neck and shoulders, and the healthy hues of the complexion of the countenance, which had shone to such advantage by candle-light.

No: Perdita was as ravishingly beautiful on this occasion, as on the former;—and there was a freshness—yes, even an appearance of virgin freshness, about her, matured and developed as her charms were, which counteracted the impression that her wanton looks and the forwardness of her manner might otherwise have created in respect to her virtue. Her depravity in

Australia had not impaired her loveliness, nor marred the youthfulness of her beauty: her face—her figure afforded not an intimation that she had been steeped in licentious enjoyments from the age of thirteen until she embarked on board the ship that wafted her to England.

The moment Charles Hatfield entered the room, he was struck by the enchanting loveliness of Perdita as much as he had been on the preceding evening—indeed, as completely as if this were the first time that he had ever seen her. For an instant he stopped short as if he dared not proceed farther within the sphere of that Circean influence which a warning voice within his soul seemed to declare was alluring him on to total destruction. but, fascinated as is the tremulous bird by the eye of the serpent, he advanced towards the beautiful creature who rose from the sofa to receive him.

Then as he felt her warm hand in his,—as her countenance beamed upon him in all the glory of its loveliness,—as her soft, musical, and delicious voice flowed upon his ear, borne on a breath fragrant as the perfume of flowers, and issuing from lips that seemed to have robbed the rose of its tint,—he felt his stern resolves thawing within him, and experienced the impossibility of manifesting coolness towards a creature of such exquisite charms and such rare fascinations.

"I thank you, my dear friend, for this punctuality," she said, gently drawing him to a seat by her side on the sofa, where she resumed her place. "Have you thought of all that passed between us last evening?—and have you reflected that we played the part of silly children in pledging eternal friendship, total strangers as we were to each other?—or did you regard the proceeding as a natural and solemn compact, to be inviolably maintained?"

"Wherefore these questions, Perdita?" enquired Charles, dazzled by the impassioned looks that were fixed upon him. "Have you yourself repented?"

"I never repent of any thing that I may do," answered Perdita, hastily. "I do nothing without being convinced beforehand that I am acting judiciously and properly; and when I most appear to be the child of impulse, I am on those occasions the most considerate, cautious, and reflective. But this may not be the case with you: and, therefore, it was incumbent upon me to ascertain your feeling in respect——"

"In respect to that friendship which I have sworn!" exclaimed Charles, no longer master of himself. "Not for world's would I recall the pledge I gave——"

"Then we are friends—friends in the manner I had hoped we should be," said the young woman. "But it was necessary that I should be assured of this before I spoke to you on a subject which otherwise would have been indifferent to you," she added, bending on her companion a look that seemed to invite him to kiss the red, pouting lips which, now parting with a delicious smile, revealed her somewhat large, but pearly, even, and admirably shaped teeth.

"Proceed, my dearest—dearest friend," exclaimed Charles, no longer thinking of Lady Frances, but totally absorbed in the fascination which attracted him towards the bewitching Perdita.

"You call me your friend—and it is as a friend that I wish to consult you, Charles," said the young woman, heaving a deep sigh. "You must know that, singular being that I may appear to you, and even unmaidenly hasty in forming so sincere a friendship——"

"No—no: you obeyed the dictates of a generous

heart—a heart as ingenuous and innocent as it is fervid and warm,” cried Charles, seizing one of her hands and pressing it in both his own.

“Ah! now you comprehend my sentiments just as I would have explained them had I been able to find language for the purpose!” she said, abandoning her hand to him as if unwittingly. “But, as I was about to observe, I am all candour and frankness:—that is my disposition;—and when you left me last evening, I immediately hastened to my mother, who was seized with a sudden indisposition which prevented her from joining us in this room; and to her I revealed at once and unhesitatingly every word of the conversation that had occurred between you and me.”

“And she doubtless reproached you for opening your heart so freely to one who was a complete stranger to you?” said Charles, now fearful lest Mrs. Fitzhardinge should forbid his visits to Perdita in future.

“She reproached me indeed—but mildly and blandly,” answered the deceitful young woman, assuming a plaintive tone; “and yet not so mildly as was her wont on former occasions—for it appears that she has formed certain views in regard to me—views of marriage—”

“Marriage, Perdita!” repeated Charles Hatfield, bitterly.

“Yes,” she responded, her voice growing more mournful still. “A man of immense wealth—and with a noble title, but whose name I do not even yet know, and whom I have never seen—”

“Oh! this is infamous, thus to dispose of you to a person whom perhaps you may never be able to love!” cried Charles, with strange emphasis and excitement of manner.

“Love! I shall hate and abhor him, even though he be handsome and amiable beyond all conception,” exclaimed Perdita. “I shall detest him for the mere fact that I am compelled to espouse him.”

“But will you yield with docility to an arrangement which seems to me—pardon the freedom with which I speak of your mother—to be indelicate and unjust?” demanded the young man.

“Alas! I fear that I have no alternative save to yield with as good a grace as I can assume,” answered Perdita, tears now starting to her eyes, and trembling on her long dark lashes; “for the nobleman whom my mother would thus force me to wed, is her opponent in the law-suit—and he has discovered a means of establishing his claims beyond all possibility of farther dispute.”

“Oh! I understand the dreadful selfishness that is now at work in respect to you!” cried Charles. “He will allow your mother to enjoy the fortune, provided you are immolated—sacrificed—”

“Yes; those are the terms;—and now you may easily comprehend how I shrink from such a fate!” exclaimed the young woman, sobbing profoundly.

“But this nobleman—who is he? what is his name?” demanded Hatfield, powerfully excited.

“I know so little of my mother’s private affairs, that I am unable to answer the questions,” said Perdita. “To speak candidly, she refused even to mention the name or the age of this unknown suitor for my hand: and therefore I apprehend the worst. Indeed, from an observation which she inadvertently dropped, I am convinced that that he is old—very old—”

“And you who are so young—and so beautiful!” cried Charles Hatfield, gazing upon her with admira-

tion—nay, with adoration and enthusiastic worship. “It were an infamy—a crime—a diabolical crime, thus to sacrifice you!”

“Yet such is my mother’s intention,” murmured Perdita; “and therefore was it that she reproached me for vowing a permanent friendship with you.”

“Then Mrs. Fitzhardinge will immolate you on the altar of selfishness—she will sell you for gold,—sell you, perhaps, to an old man who may be hideous, and who is certain to be loathsome to you?” exclaimed Charles, speaking with all the rapidity of wild excitement.

“Yes:—and it was not until last night that I was aware of the frightful arrangement which my mother had thus made—the dreadful compact to which she had assented. It seems that this nobleman had heard of me—and the description given of my appearance pleased him; so that when he yesterday discovered the existence of some paper which at once annihilated all my mother’s previously conceived hopes of gaining the law-suit, he proposed his hateful conditions.”

“And Mrs. Fitzhardinge has now sought her attorney—”

“For the purpose of declaring that I assent to this most unnatural union!” added Perdita, with the well-feigned emphasis of violent sorrow.

“But was it possible that you could hold out to your mother even the faintest prospect of thus sacrificing all your happiness suddenly and in a moment?” demanded Charles.

“When I beheld my mother weep—heard her implore and beseech—and was made aware of the ruin that threatened her unless I agreed to the proposals of this unknown suitor, I wept also—and, my tears choking me, my silence was taken for assent. Then my mother departed to visit her solicitor: and in my despair I despatched a note to you, praying you to call on me during her absence.”

“My God! what counsel—what advice can I give you?” exclaimed Charles, bewildered by the tale which was told so plausibly that not a doubt of its truth existed in his mind. “I cannot see you sacrificed thus:—yet how can I save you? Oh! were I possessed of a fortune, I would bestow it upon your mother that she might leave you free and unshackled to obey only the dictates of your own will—follow your own inclinations—and bestow your hand where you could likewise grant your affections!”

“Ah! my generous friend,” murmured Perdita, advancing her countenance towards his own as if unwittingly and in the excitement of her feelings: “how deeply grateful to you am I for these assurances! I knew that I should receive your sympathy—if not your aid,—your commiseration—if not your assistance.”

“How can I assist you, dearest Perdita?” exclaimed Charles, pressing her hand violently in his own. “The liberality of my pa—my uncle and aunt, I mean—have enabled me to accumulate some seven or eight hundred pounds—for my allowance is far more liberal than my expenditure: and that amount is at your mother’s service. But it is so small—so contemptibly small in comparison with the fortune which she doubtless hopes to acquire—”

“Nevertheless, it may procure a delay, by rescuing my mother from the immediate embarrassments in which this sudden change in the aspect of her affairs has plunged her,” said Perdita: “for, to speak candidly to you, her solicitor has been advancing her a regular income during the time that the suit has

lasted;—and now, since all hope of gaining it is destroyed, no farther supplies can be expected from that quarter."

"Yes—it may procure a delay," said Charles, in a musing tone; "and with leisure to reflect calmly—deliberately—much may be done! O Perdita—never, never could I see you thus sacrificed to a man whom you would abhor!"

"Generous friend—'twas heaven who sent you to me!" exclaimed the young woman, drooping her head upon his breast, and weeping,—weeping tears of gratitude, as he fondly believed.

He threw his arms around her—he pressed her to his heart—he clasped her with such fervour that the embrace was passionately violent—he strained her as it were to the seat of his very soul: then, hastily loosening his hold, he raised her face—her warm, blushing face—and on her lips he imprinted a thousand rapturous kisses,—those lips that were literally glued to his own. He looked into her eyes, and read love, desire, and passion in those orbs, now melting with languor and wantonness;—for Perdita herself had almost entirely lost all power of self-control, and clung to him as if inviting the full extreme of voluptuous enjoyment. He felt her bosom heaving against his chest; and, maddened with excitement, his daring hand invaded the treasures of those swelling, palpitating globes, so snowy in their whiteness—so warm with their licentious fires.

But at that instant Perdita recovered her presence of mind: and it flashed to her memory that it was no part of her scheme to surrender herself completely up to him until she had ensnared his affections so fully—so inextricably, that all subsequent escape or estrangement, through repentance and remorse, should be impossible.

Accordingly—wresting herself from his embrace, and retreating to the farther end of the sofa, she hastily arranged her cap and dishevelled hair—drew the wrapper over her breast—and, turning upon him eyes that still seemed to swim in liquid languor, said in a half-reproachful manner, "Oh! Charles—is this friendship? would you ruin me?"

"Sweetest—dearest creature," exclaimed the young man, "did I not tell you yester-night that *friendship* was a sentiment dangerous for us to feel, and a word perilous for our tongues to utter? O Perdita—it is not friendship that I feel for you: 'tis love—ardent, sincere, and devoted love! And 't was not friendship at first sight that I experienced for you the moment I last evening set foot in this room: but 'twas love—love, my Perdita—such love as never before did man entertain for woman!"

"And it was because I love you, Charles," murmured Perdita, in her softest, tenderest tones, "that I loathe and abhor the idea of that union which my mother has so inconsiderately—so rashly—so cruelly planned for me!"

"You love me, Perdita!" ejaculated the young man, wild with joy: "oh! thanks—ten thousand thanks for that assurance, my own sweet Perdita! I was happy in the possession of your friendship: but I am now mad—demented in the confidence of owning your love! For the love of such a being as yourself is something that would make a paradise of the blackest and most barren desert on the face of the earth! Is it possible, then, that I possess your love, Perdita—dearest Perdita? Oh! tell me so once more: it is so delicious to hear such an avowal from your lips!"

"Yes, Charles—I love you—I do indeed love you,"

replied the young woman, throwing as much softness into her melting tones, as much witchery into her manner, and as much voluptuous languor into her glances as she possibly could.

It was like a scene of enchantment for that young man of wild and fervid impulses; and he was completely—wholly absorbed in its magic interest,—an interest so enthralling, so captivating that he felt as if he had been suddenly wafted into a new world of delights unknown in this sublunary sphere. Lady Frances was forgotten—his parents, his ambitious aims, and even his admiration of the Prince of Montoni,—all, all were forgotten in the delirium of passion which had seized upon him.

"You love me—you do indeed love me!" he exclaimed; and, approaching the object of his worship, he again wound his arms around her—again drank in the sweetness of her moist red lips.

"Charles—Charles," she murmured; "you are gloriously handsome—and I adore you!"

But as she thus spoke, she once more disengaged herself from his maddened embrace—for she felt that her own passions, ever violent, were raging to a degree that became almost uncontrollable.

"And now listen to me—patiently and tranquilly if you can; and I will lay down the conditions on which our complete happiness may be based,—conditions which have for their elements that generous confidence, that mutual reliance, and that candour and frankness which alone constitute pure affection."

"Proceed, dearest Perdita," said Hatfield: "I am all attention—and your voice is sweeter in my ears than the most delicious music."

Perdita once more arranged her cap and the massive bands of her glossy hair: then, turning with a simulation of charming artlessness towards her companion, she addressed him in the following manner.

CHAPTER CXXXII.

THE DANGEROUS SOPHISTRY OF A LOVELY WOMAN.

"You are now about to discover a new phasis in my character, dear Charles; and perhaps you will look upon my notions and opinions as unmaidenly and bold—if not positively immoral. But remember that I am not like the generality of my sex; and that my sentiments, though audacious as innovations, are nevertheless as sincerely believed in as they are tenaciously clung to by me."

"It is because you are so different from other women, not only in the loveliness of your person, but also in the tone and strength of your mind," said Charles, "that I am thus enamoured of you—yes, and proud too of possessing your affection in return."

"But I am about to preach a doctrine which you may think repugnant to the befitting delicacy of my sex," returned Perdita: "for it is of the uselessness of the marriage rites that I have now to discourse."

"Proceed, dearest," said Charles; "and I will frankly give you my opinion on your views in this respect."

"Ah! now you encourage me to open my heart to you, my dear friend," exclaimed Perdita; "and yet do not affect the sanctimonious hypocrite, who frowns even before he has heard the argument broached. Thus stands our present position in my estimation:—We love each other—"

"Devotedly—earnestly," added Charles, with strong emphasis, the image of Lady Frances being as completely banished from his mind as if such a person as that charming creature did not exist in the world.

"Yes—we love each other devotedly and earnestly," continued Perdita; "and the extent as well as the ardour of our passion is a something which should remain a solemn and sacred mystery to the vulgar and curious observer. 'Tis a secret which we should cherish between ourselves,—a secret whose charm is spoilt, or at all events marred, by being revealed to others who are indifferent to us. This is one reason wherefore I consider the pompous ceremony of marriage to be actually detrimental to the fervid, ardent, and warm attachment which seeks to hide itself in the bosoms of the fond couple who entertain it. Then, again, I should not be happy were I to have the conviction that I was so enchained to you by legal trammels that you could not cast me off did I become displeasing to you;—for I should never know whether you still clung to me through the endurance of real affection, or because an indissoluble bond forged by human legislation united us. No:—I would rather that our love rested upon its own basis alone—existing by its own vitality, and through no borrowed and artificial auxiliary,—that it should be a mutual confidence—a mutual reliance,—free and independent in one sense, and compulsory in none. If on these terms you will take thy Perdita to thine arms, Charles—then indeed shall I gladly become thine:—but if our union must be characterised by solemn ceremonies and cold, inanimate rites—then, heartbreaking as the alternative will be, I can never—never be more to thee than a sincere and faithful friend."

"Dearest Perdita," exclaimed Charles, "I receive all these confessions of your peculiar sentiments as new proofs of your love for me! For by the very nature of the conditions which you stipulate, you convince me of the trust which you repose in my fidelity and honour."

"Yes—because in defiance of the opinion of the world, I surrender myself up to you, to be a wife in every thing save in respect to that ceremony which is the first object of a virtuous woman's thoughts," murmured Perdita. "And now, dear Charles, do you entertain a mean opinion of my principles, because I dare to chalk out a path of happiness according to my own fancy?"

"No—no, Perdita!" cried the young man, pressing to his lips the hand which was extended to him with such an appearance of ingenuousness that it quite enchanted him. "But how is it possible that you—so young—should have pondered so seriously on the subject of love and of marriage? For you have assured me that you never loved till now—"

"Though nineteen summers have not yet passed over my head," interrupted Perdita, "my mind has travelled much in the realms of thought and meditation;—and though, as I will candidly confess to you, I have read but little, yet have I pondered much."

"And there is about you a mystery as charming and as interesting as your loveliness is indescribably great," said Charles: "and you know, angel that you are, how I adore you!"

"Then if we plight our faith to each other to-day, as solemnly and as emphatically as yester-night we vowed an eternal friendship, shall you ever repent the step you will have taken?" asked Perdita, gazing affectionately on her handsome companion, whose looks seemed to devour her.

"Repent!—what, repent the step that makes you mine?" he exclaimed. "No—never, never!"

"And you take me as your wife on the conditions I have named—that I am to be a wife, and no wife?" said Perdita, her musical voice sounding soft as a silver bell and tremulously clear,—ravishment in her tone, love in her eyes, and warmth in the tender pressure of the hand which the young man had grasped.

"Yes—I take you as my wife on those conditions," he returned, pressing her to his bosom. "But there are still many things to be considered, my Perdita," he observed, after a short pause, during which they exchanged the most rapturous kisses. "In the first place, your mother—"

"I shall boldly acquaint her with what I have done," said Perdita; "and she will not seal my unhappiness by an opposition—which, after all, would be vain and useless," added the syren.

"And will not Mrs. Fitzhardinge recoil in horror from the idea that her daughter should have formed this connexion, without bearing the legal name of a wife?" demanded Charles, gazing earnestly on her beautiful countenance.

"Leave me to make my mother a convert to my own principles respecting marriage," was the reply. "And now, with regard to yourself, my Charles,—you need be under no restraint. Continue to dwell with your family—and visit me as frequently as you can. In fact, I shall of course expect you to pass as much of your time as possible with me,—but never when your relatives and friends require your presence."

"Oh! on these terms we shall indeed be supremely happy!" cried Charles. "And now you are my wife?"

"Yes—and you are my husband," blushing answered the syren, as she drooped her head upon his breast.

He wound his arms around her; and then their lips met in warm and luscious kisses. Charles grew bolder: his hand wandered to Perdita's glowing bosom,—and Perdita no longer restrained him—no longer shrank back. Still, however, she did not choose to surrender herself immediately: a little more tantalization would only rivet his enthusiastic attachment and confirm the madness of his devouring passion;—and, accordingly—at the moment when, wild with desire, he was about to claim the privilege of a husband, she started from his arms, exclaiming, "Hush! my mother has returned—I hear her approaching!"

They separated—retreating to the ends of the sofa; and Perdita arranged her disordered hair once more.

No one however came: it was a false alarm,—as Perdita indeed well knew it to be.

"You must leave me now, Charles," she said; "for my mother cannot be long ere she comes back. Tomorrow, at mid-day, I shall be again alone—for I am aware that she will have to pay another visit to her attorney. Come, then, at that hour—and I will tell you all that has passed between my parent and myself."

"Not an instant later than twelve to-morrow shall I be!" exclaimed Charles. "And now,—forgive me for returning for a moment to worldly affairs—quitting the paradise of happiness to which you have raised me, my Perdita,—but in respect to the small sum—"

"Oh! I had forgotten all our arrangements with regard to that matter," said Perdita: "and, indeed—I detest and abominate money-affairs. But now—as your wife, dearest Charles—I may mention my

wishes on that head without a blush. I should therefore be pleased, if you could forward the amount to me in the course of the afternoon; and I will use it to the best possible advantage with my mother."

"In less than an hour it shall be here in an envelope, sealed, and addressed to yourself," said Charles. "Farewell, my sweet Perdita—farewell, until to-morrow!"

They embraced each other fervently; and Charles Hatfield took his departure.

Before he returned home, he walked into the park to collect his scattered thoughts and acquire some degree of composure. His perfidy—his infamous treachery towards Lady Frances now burst upon him in all its hideousness. That very morning had he demanded his cousin's hand in marriage;—and within an hour afterwards he had solemnly contracted a strange and scarcely comprehensible union with Perdita Fitzhardinge.

His conduct seemed vile in the extreme: his heart, smote him painfully.

Yet was he so completely infatuated with Perdita, that he could not calmly contemplate the idea of breaking with her for ever. He was like a gambler who loathes himself for his ready yielding to a ruinous vice—but who nevertheless returns with renewed zest to the gaming-table.

For Charles thought of the happiness which he had so nearly attained on this eventful day, and which he felt assured must await him on the morrow:—he could not banish from his imagination the recollection of those charms which had plunged him into a perfect delirium of passion;—and the more he thought on the witching loveliness of Perdita, the less inclined was he to resign her.

Then came the almost inevitable results of the sophistry which the designing woman had called to her aid,—results which may be explained the more completely by following the current of the young man's thoughts.

"After all, I am not indissolubly bound to Perdita—nor has she for ever linked her destiny with mine. No marriage ceremony has taken place between us—nor will any. I am not inextricably fastened to her apron-strings. And yet—and yet, is it honourable of me to make such calculations, the inferences to be drawn from which I am ashamed even to express to my own secret self? No—no: because no legal ties exist between us, I am the more imperiously bound to remain faithfully attached to her! Beautiful—enchanting—mysterious Perdita, how hast thou enthralled me! But—my God! am I not your willing slave?—do I not accept the yoke which thou hast thrown upon me?—would I release myself from those silken chains, even were I able? No—ten thousand times no, my adored—my worshipped Perdita! I care not whether thou dost exercise a supernatural enchantment over me: if thou art Satan in a female shape—or a serpent, as my dream appeared to give warning—I cannot cease to love thee,—no—never—never!"

But what of Lady Frances Ellingham? Oh! it was rash—it was indiscreet of him to solicit her hand;—but had he not acted in pursuance of the advice of his father?—and had he gone so far as to be unable to retreat?

Alas! Charles Hatfield, the sophistry of Perdita has rendered thee sophistical, until thou dost stand on the very threshold of—villainy!

Reckless art thou of the whisperings of conscience:—thou art infatuated with the fatal beauty of thy

Perdita—and the hope, the burning hope of tasting in her arms the pleasures of paradise, renders thee studious only to subdue the remorse that whispers to thee the name of the outraged Lady Frances Ellingham!

Having wandered in the park for upwards of half an hour, Charles Hatfield bethought himself of the promise to send the amount of his savings to his beautiful Perdita; and, hastening home, he sought his chamber, which he reached unperceived by any one save the domestic who gave him admission. That he was thus unobserved, was a source of satisfaction,—inasmuch as he felt that his cheeks were flushed, and he feared lest his appearance might seem singular.

Opening his desk he took from a secret drawer the Bank-notes which constituted his savings; and enveloping them in a sheet of paper, he issued forth again to leave the parcel at the house in Suffolk Street. This being done, Charles returned to the park, where he roamed about until the hour arrived when it was necessary for him to return home in order to dress for dinner.

The reader must not forget that a splendid banquet was to take place that evening at the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham,—a banquet given in honour of the Prince of Montoni, and at which his Royal Highness was to be present.

As the hour approached, Charles Hatfield felt his heart beat; and all his admiration of the illustrious hero revived;—so that his mind was labouring under no inconsiderable degree of excitement, as he thought of Perdita on the one hand—the Prince on the other—and also of Lady Frances Ellingham!

CHAPTER CXXXIII.

A THRONE SURROUNDED BY REPUBLICAN INSTITUTIONS.

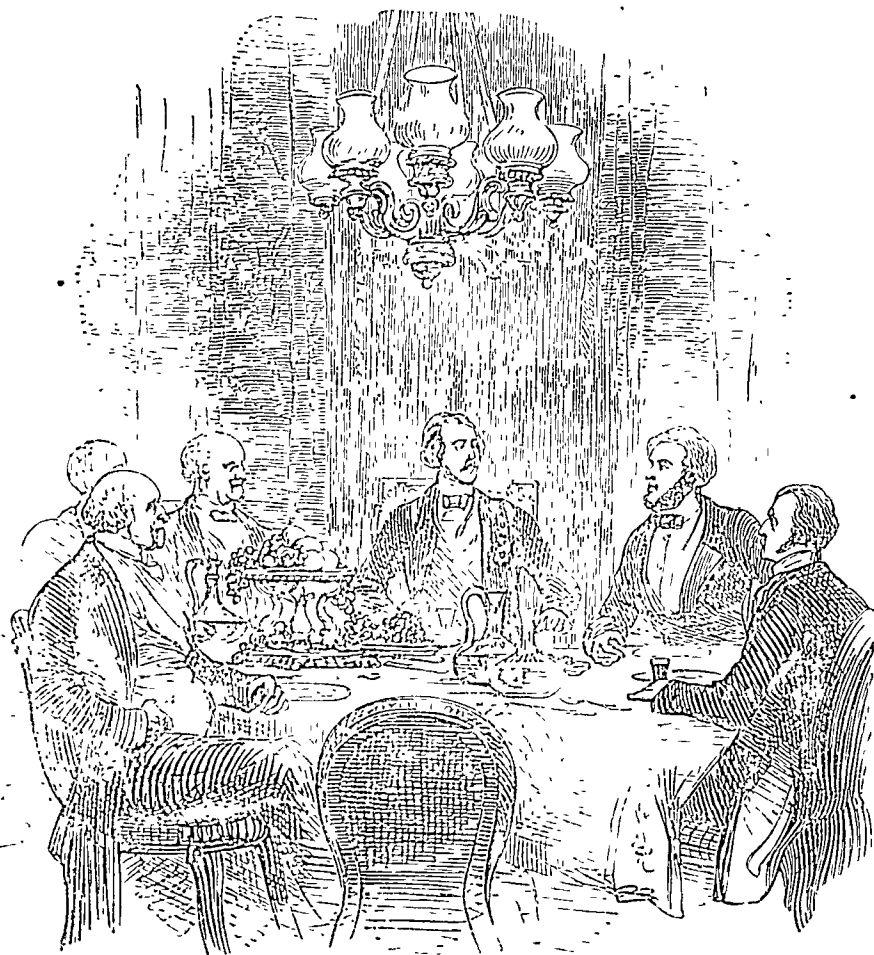
THE entertainment was of the most splendid description—worthy of the hospitality and taste of the noble host and hostess.

The Prince of Montoni was dressed in plain clothes: but on his breast gleamed the star denoting his rank; and on his left leg he wore the English Garter, his Royal Highness having been admitted on the previous day a member of that illustrious Order.

He was seated on the right of the Countess of Ellingham, Lady Frances being next to him, and Charles Hatfield occupying the place immediately following. In addition to these personages, and the Earl of Ellingham, Mr. Hatfield, and Lady Georgiana there were Sir John Lascelles, Clarence Villiers and Adolais, and the select few who had been invited to the banquet on this occasion.

The Prince was naturally of a modest and unassuming disposition,—though endowed with ample dignity to maintain his lofty rank and honourably fill his high position,—yet bearing himself so condescendingly and affably, that every one felt completely at ease in his presence. Even Sir John Lascelles, who had grown somewhat morose, and difficult to please in his old age, was quite delighted with the youthful hero, whose conversation was characterised by so much sound sense and such a total absence of obtrusiveness.

Charles Hatfield was delighted at the thought of being once more in company with the object of his worship; and he seemed to hang upon every word



that fell from the lips of the Prince of Montoni, as if he were listening to a demigod.

When the ladies had retired, the conversation turned upon political matters; and the Earl of Ellingham questioned the Prince relative to the condition of the Casteleicalans, whom report, newspapers, and books represented to be in the highest possible state of civilisation, prosperity, and happiness.

"His Sovereign Highness, my revered father-in-law," said the Prince, "has exerted himself in all possible ways to render his people contented and flourishing. The task may seem to be difficult for a monarch to undertake; but it really is not so. Honourable, upright, and liberal-minded Ministers are to be found in all countries, if the sovereign have but the discrimination to select them: indeed, a Chamber of Deputies, rightly constituted, will be sure to indicate the most efficient and trust-worthy men to whom the responsibilities of government may be safely confided. Every man in Casteleicala, having a habitation in which he may be said to be settled,—no matter whether it be a house of his own, or a mere lodging,—has the right of suffrage. The elections take place by ballot; and thus, considering that all save absolute

mendicants have the power of voting, and seeing likewise the immense number of voters that there are, bribery is almost impossible. But to ensure, as much as mortal means can, the purity of election, any attempt at bribery or intimidation is counted a misdemeanor, and is punished by a fine, imprisonment, and the loss of civil rights for a period of seven years. Under the circumstances our elections take place in an orderly, quiet, and honest manner: the people conduct themselves with propriety, because they recognise the generous confidence reposed in them by their sovereign, and endeavour to render themselves worthy of it."

"When your Royal Highness liberated Casteleicala and opened the way for the Grand Duke Alberto to the throne," said Sir John Lascollos, who had listened attentively to the Prince's observations, "the Casteleicalans were in a state of abject slavery. Were these boons of consummate freedom conferred upon them in a moment?—and if so, were the people prepared in any way to receive them?"

"A nation in slavery, Sir John," answered the Prince, "is like a body in a condition of deep disease. Now, would you restore that body to perfect health all in a moment, if you had the power?—or would

you only effect the restoration by slow and almost imperceptible degrees?"

"As a conscientious and an honest man, I should of course adopt the mode of instantaneous cure," replied the physician.

"Then, Sir John, your question whether the Castelcicalans were prepared to receive the consummation of their freedom in a moment, is answered," said the Prince, smiling. "Believe me, those statesmen who talk of the necessity of gradual reform are either weak and timid, or else in their hearts opposed to the interests of the people. Freedom is a nation's right; and a right cannot be recognised too suddenly nor too frankly. Were your fortune in the grasp of a rapacious monarch, should you be contented by receiving it in small instalments according to his caprice and good pleasure? No: certainly not! You would demand and expect to receive the whole at once—and would consider yourself the victim of a monstrous tyranny, were your claims refused, or ridiculed, or set at naught. Yes, Sir John—the Castelcicalans obtained in a moment, as it were, their emancipation from tyranny and oppression. Immediately after His Sovereign Highness ascended the throne of that powerful State, he promulgated a decree, not merely conceding universal suffrage as a boon, but at once proclaiming it as the recognised right of the people. He did not say, 'I give it to you;' but he said, 'I do not for an instant attempt to withhold it.' The people saw that they were not treated as children, but as a free and enlightened nation; and they generously proffered gratitude, and testified their admiration and respect for their monarch. The Chambers assembled in due time—both Senators and Deputies being elected, and the principle of an hereditary Peerage being totally eschewed. Not even is the President of the Senate appointed by the Grand Duke: he is chosen by his peers, as is the President of the Chamber of Deputies. The Grand Duke pledged himself to retain in power or to nominate only those Ministers whom the parliamentary majority pointed out; and, accordingly, the Cabinet which I had the honour to appoint during the period when I exercised the functions of Regent, immediately after the battle of Montoni, has remained in office ever since that time—because it is supported by the majority. There is an Opposition in both Chambers,—an Opposition consisting of the Aristocracy of the Old School, High Churchmen, and a few very wealthy landowners; and indeed an Opposition is necessary to all good government, because were measures passed by universal acclamation, there would be no sifting of all their details to the very bottom. The Progressist Ministry in Castelcicala is therefore rather thankful to the Opposition than otherwise;—but the popular voice is entirely in favour of the Ministerial party."

"The Grand Duke is therefore almost a cypher in Castelcicala?" observed Sir John Lascelles.

"Not so," returned the Prince, mildly but firmly. "There must be a chief magistrate—an executive—in every State; and he is that chief magistrate. Do you suppose that the task of discriminating and rewarding merit,—in patronising the arts and sciences,—in raising the humble but deserving individual,—and in performing all the various services to a country which the supreme ruler must ever have the opportunity of doing,—do you not suppose, Sir John Lascelles, that these are duties which render a good Prince anything but a cypher? It is true that Castelcicala has a Throne; but it is sur-

rounded by Republican Institutions;—and it matters very little whether Alberto be called President, Grand Duke, Emperor, or King. There is nothing in the name of the office: all that merits our attention is the extent of the privileges of that office."

"But the sovereignty of Castelcicala is hereditary," said Sir John Lascelles; "and yet your Royal Highness is an opponent to the hereditary peerage. If the principle be objectionable in the one case—"

"Pardon me for interrupting you, sir," exclaimed the Prince: "but you are arguing on a false premise. The hereditary principle is abolished even in respect to the sovereignty. Alberto voluntarily abdicated this dynastic privilege; and one of his first acts was to place his diadem at the disposal of the Chambers. He told them that he was willing to obey the sovereign will of the people. The Chambers confirmed him in his high office; and of their own accord they honoured me by naming me the heir-apparent to the throne. But the hereditary principle is virtually annihilated; because one generation cannot bind its successor; and the law which thus appointed me as the heir-apparent, may be repealed by a new Chamber. It is monstrous to suppose that the hereditary principle can be tolerated by a nation knowing its own power and appreciating its own interests: for that principle may give you a good sovereign to-day, and a tyrant, an idiot, or a degraded sensualist to-morrow."

"I admit the force of your Royal Highness's argument," said Lascelles; "and if I object it is rather to seek information on these subjects than to question the excellence of the system of government introduced into Castelcicala. I would now deferentially seek to learn how far that system has benefitted the people of your Highness's adopted country?"

"In the first place, Sir John," returned the Prince, "the people have the elections entirely in their own hands, and return to Parliament representatives who do not buy their seats, but who are chosen on account of their merits. At least, this observation applies to the great majority of the Senators and Deputies. The elections take place every two years; so that ample opportunity is allowed the constituents of getting rid of persons who may chance to deceive them or prove incapable; while a sufficient space of time is afforded for giving the representatives a fair trial. The result of these arrangements is, that the majority of the representatives legislate for the interests of the mass—and not of the few. Good measures are the consequence; and the happiness of the people is promoted, while civilisation progresses rapidly, and the prosperity of the country increases daily. My lord," continued the Prince, turning towards the Earl of Ellingham, "history has recorded the memorable speech which your lordship delivered nineteen years ago in the House of Lords—the speech that first introduced your lordship to the world as the generous defender, vindicator, and champion of the People;—and it rejoices me unfeignedly to be enabled to inform you, my noble friend—for so you will permit me to call you—that the speech I allude to, and all your subsequent orations on the same subject have been studied, weighed, and debated upon in the Councils of the Sovereign of Castelcicala."

The Earl acknowledged the compliment in befitting terms; and the Prince of Montoni continued in the following manner:—

"To prove to your lordships that it is no idle flattery—of which, indeed, I am incapable—that I am now addressing to you, I will at once inform you that every suggestion which your lordship's first and grandest

eration contained, has been carried out with complete success in Castledale. Anticipating the chance of being enabled this evening to give your lordship some account of the condition of the Castledaleans, I had furnished myself with a copy of the memorable speech to which I have already several times alluded; and I will now explain in detail the results of your lordship's views, as exemplified in their application to the Grand Duchy."

The Prince produced a manuscript; and, spreading it before him, his Royal Highness continued in the ensuing terms,—addressing himself to a most attentive and delighted audience:—

"Your lordship stated that it was too frequently alleged that the industrious classes are thoughtless, improvident, ungrateful, and intellectually dull: but this assertion you emphatically denied; and you proceeded to reason thus:—'Despair, produced by their unhappy condition, naturally led to dissipation in many instances; but were the working man placed in a position so that his livelihood should be rendered less precarious than it now was—were his labour adequately remunerated—were he more fairly paid by the representatives of property—were a scale of wages established, having a fixed *minimum*, but not no fixed *maximum*, the increased comfort thus ensured to him would naturally remove from his mind those cares which drove him to the public-house.'—Well, my lord and gentlemen," continued the Prince, "the suggestion has been adopted in Castledale; a fixed *minimum* for wages has been established—the lowest amount of payment ensuring a sum sufficient to enable the working man to maintain himself and his family in respectability. The result may almost be said to have been instantaneous. Crime diminished rapidly: statistical returns soon proved that intemperance experienced a remarkable decrease; and such was the falling off in the consumption of spirituous liquors, beer, and tobacco, that the Government found it necessary to grant a compensation to the licensed victuallers, publicans, and tobaccoists who suffered by this change in the habits of the people. Even employers speedily began to recognise the advantage of the new state of things in the improved condition of their employed, the increase and the excellence of the labour they obtained, and the superiority of their agriculture or their manufactures. No *maximum* of wages has been fixed in Castledale; and when I left the country a month ago, those wages were higher than ever they were known to be before. The demand for labour has greatly increased; and, though the territory be densely populated, employment may be found for all. If a man be now a pauper or mendicant in Castledale, it must be either through physical infirmity, or through his unwillingness to work. Of this latter, however, we have comparatively few examples—ambition and patriotism acting powerfully in a country where so much happiness and such prosperity prevail. Now, with a slight alteration in your lordship's speech, one of the most remarkable passages in that speech reads thus when applied to Castledale:—'There is no fixed *maximum* of wages, because wages are always to be increased in proportion to the value of productive labour to employers; but there is a *minimum* established, to obviate the cruel and disastrous effects of those periods when labour exceeds the demand in the market. This is not considered unfair towards employers, because when the markets are brisk and trade is flourishing, they (the employers)

reap the greatest benefit from that activity, and enrich themselves in a very short time; therefore, when markets are dull and trade is stagnant, they are still compelled to pay such wages as enable their employed to live comfortably. The profits gained during prosperous seasons not only enable employers to enjoy handsome incomes, but also to accumulate considerable savings; and as the best wages scarcely enable the employed to make anything like an adequate provision for periods of distress, it is not deemed fair that the representatives of property should use the labour of the working classes just when it suits them, and discard it or only use it on a miserable recompense when it does not so well suit them. For the labour of the employed not only makes annual incomes for the employers, but also permanent fortunes; and the value of that labour is not calculated as lasting only just as long as it is available for the purpose of producing large profits. Labour is recognised in Castledale and positively stated to be the working man's *capital*, and bears constant interest, as well as money placed in the funds—that interest of course increasing in proportion to the briskness of markets; but never depreciating below a standard value—much less being discarded as valueless altogether, in times of depression. A thousand pounds always obtains three per cent. interest, under any circumstances; and at particular periods, is worth six or seven per cent. Labour is considered by the Castledaleans in the same light. Stagnant markets diminish the profits of employers, but do not ruin them; if they do not obtain profit enough to live upon, they have the accumulations of good seasons to fall back upon. But how different used to be the case with the employed! To them stagnation of business was ruin—starvation—death;—the breaking up of their little homes—the sudden check of their children's education—the cause of demoralisation and degradation—and the necessity of applying to the parish! All these terrible evils have been completely annihilated by the system introduced into Castledale. The supply and demand of labour are necessarily unequal at many times, and in many districts; and the Government has therefore adopted measures to prevent those frightful fluctuations in wages which carry desolation into the homes of thousands of hard-working, industrious, and deserving families. In fact, a law has been passed to ensure the working-man against the casualty of being employed at a price below remuneration.'—Thus, my lord, you perceive that so far your views have been most successfully carried out: they are no longer a theory—I have seen them reduced to positive practice; and I pledge myself most solemnly and sacredly to the admirable working of this enlightened reformatory system."

"Would that I could see my own fellow-countrymen rendered thus happy—raised thus high in the social sphere—and thus tenderly cared for by their rulers!" exclaimed Lord Ellingham, in the impassioned tone of the most earnest and heart-felt sincerity.

"The day must come," observed the Prince of Montoui, "when the English people will recognise all the grand truths which you enunciated nineteen years ago from your place in the House of Lords. And, in England you have failed to convince the aristocracy and the landowners of the wickedness of the course they are pursuing,—are not your labours in some degree rewarded by the knowledge that your lordship's plans have been carried out to the very letter in the

Grand Duchy of Castelcicala,—yes, and carried out too with such unequivocal success?"

"The information which your Royal Highness now imparts, gives me the most unfeigned pleasure," said the Earl. "I had indeed read and heard of the recent grand improvements which had taken place in that Italian State where there is a Throne surrounded by Republican Institutions: but I was not aware—indeed, the loftiest flights of vanity never could have suggested to me that my views and theories had in any way contributed to the prosperity of the MODEL STATE, as the Liberals in England now denominate Castelcicala."

"To convince you, my lord, how far your ideas have been applied to the elevation of Castelcicala to its present proud eminence," said the Prince, "I will again refer to a passage in your lordship's ever memorable speech, and point a few contrasts. 'In England the poor are not allowed to have a stake in the country;' I have shown you that the very reverse is the case in the Grand Duchy. 'In England there are no small properties: the land is in the possession of a few individuals comparatively; and thus the landed interest constitutes a tremendous monopoly, most unjust and oppressive to the industrious classes.'—In Castelcicala the law of primogeniture is annihilated; there no man can leave his estate solely to his eldest son; it must be divided amongst all his male children equally, a charge being fixed upon it for the support of his daughters. Thus the territory is rapidly undergoing a process of sub-division, which admits thousands to the enjoyment of a real stake in the country, and breaks down the tremendous monopoly of the landed interest. In Castelcicala, moreover, 'property is compelled to maintain labour as long as labour seeks for employment and occupation.' What now, then, is the condition of the Castelcicalan people? Being well treated, rendered free, and having every possible avenue opened to them for the attainment of real property, 'the working classes are not driven by their cares and troubles to the excessive use of alcoholic liquors; they do not become demoralized by being compelled to migrate from place to place in search of employment—they are not forced to go upon the tramp, sleeping in hideous dens of vice, where numbers are forced to herd together without reference to age or sex; they are not unsettled in all their little arrangements to bring up their children creditably and with due reference to instruction;—they are not made discontented, anxious for any change no matter what, vindictive towards a society which renders them outcasts, and sullen or reckless in their general conduct.'—On the contrary, they feel settled in their condition; they know that the cottage which constitutes their home, is not held upon a precarious tenure: they never feel the sickening conviction that if they have bread and meat to-day, they may have only bread to-morrow, and no food at all the day after. The industrious classes in Castelcicala are no longer the mere slaves and tools of the wealthy classes: they are no longer retained in bondage—no longer kept in absolute serfdom by an oligarchy. I now pass to another subject," said the Prince: "and here again I refer to the speech of the Earl of Ellingham—applying to Castelcicala the observations which he used in reference to England. The Castelcicalan industrious classes, then, 'were ground down by indirect taxes, in which shape they actually contributed more to the revenue, in proportion to their means, than the rich. The only luxuries which the poor

enjoyed, and which had become as it were necessities—namely, tea, sugar, tobacco, beer, and spirits,—were the most productive sources of revenue. If aristocrats reproached the poor for dirty habits, as he well knew that it was their custom to do, he would ask them why soap was made an article subject to so heavy a tax? It was a contemptible fallacy to suppose that because the poor contributed little or nothing in the shape of direct taxation to the revenue, they were positively untaxed. The real fact was that the poor paid more in direct taxes than the rich did in both direct and in indirect ways, when the relative means of the two parties were taken into consideration.'—Such was the state of the industrious classes of Castelcicala until their voice was heard in the legislative assemblies; and all taxes upon the necessities of life were speedily removed. Luxuries alone were left to bear the weight of taxation—the duties upon carriages, livery-servants, armorial bearings, hunters, racers, hounds, and foreign wines being doubled."

The Prince of Montoni paused; and the Earl of Ellingham exchanged a rapid but significant glance with Mr. Hatfield—for they both remembered the time when, nineteen years previously, and when the latter lay on the bed in Old Death's house, they had conversed upon the best means of ameliorating the condition of the suffering millions.

His Royal Highness, finding that his auditors were most anxious that he should continue his explanations, and perceiving that Sir John Lascelles had become especially interested therein, resumed his subject in the following manner:—

"The inequality of the laws, and their incongruity, severity, and injustice towards the poor, long constituted a crying evil in Castelcicala. 'Every advantage was given to the rich in the way of procuring bail in those cases where security for personal appearance was required; but no poor man could possibly give such security. He must go to prison, and there herd with felons of the blackest dye. Perhaps on trial his innocence would transpire; and then what recompense had he for his long incarceration—his home broken up during his absence—and his ruined family? It was possible—nay, it often happened that a man would lie thus in prison for four or five months previously to trial; and during that period it would be strange indeed if he escaped gaol contamination.'—In order to remedy these evils, vast facilities were afforded in respect to bail, the respectability and not the monied qualifications of the sureties being considered. Thus a working man may be bailed by any two of his associates who can obtain a good character from their employer: this of course applies to charges of a lighter kind, heavier responsibility being required where a serious accusation is involved. But even should an accused have to go to prison until his trial, he is not placed in a felons' gaol: he is not, while still untried, subjected to that indignity and contamination. He is confined in a building having no connexion with a prison, and termed *A House of Detention*. Again, the judges have the power to order a compensation to every one whose innocence transpires on trial; and I must inform you that the trial may take place as soon after committal as the individual chooses. All depends on the speed which he makes in getting up his defence. When committed, he is asked if he have the means of retaining counsel: if he prove to the magistrate that he is poor, a barrister is immediately provided for him. The trial may come on the very next day;

For there are local Courts throughout the Grand Duchy, and these courts have no recess—no holiday. When I, on my return to Castledicala, to inform a person not well acquainted with English laws and customs, that in this very same enlightened England a man may languish several months in a common gaol awaiting his trial, I should scarcely be believed."

"And what is the nature of the punishments inflicted in the country of your Royal Highness's adoption?" enquired Sir John Lascelles.

"I will tell you," said the Prince. "In the first place we have abolished the punishment of death, as barbarian, un-Christian, and demoralizing. Murder is punished by imprisonment for life; and imprisonment, fine, confiscation of property in the cases of single men having no persons dependent on them, and the loss of civil rights—these are the penalties used amongst us. The individual who is condemned to imprisonment, is not on that account rendered a useless member of society. Every criminal gaol is an assemblage of workshops where all trades and manufactures are carried on; and each prisoner must work at his own trade, or be taught one. If he have a family out-of-doors, his earnings go to support that family: if he have none, they accumulate until the day of his release. Should he refuse to work, he is put upon bread and water; and this soon compels him to adopt habits of industry in order to obtain plentiful and wholesome meals. Castledicalan prisons resemble vast factories rather than gaols; and so admirable—so salutary—so reformatory is the discipline maintained in them, that a prisoner on his emancipation finds no difficulty in obtaining work again. Employers consider, in such a case, that he has expiated an offence which should not be remembered to his prejudice; and he begins the world again with a new character. He has, as it were, passed through a criminal bankruptcy court, and obtained his certificate. Should he, however, experience any difficulty in finding employment, the local authorities are bound to supply him with work at the average rate of wages. The results of all these arrangements are striking. In the first place, a Castledicalan prison is reformatory instead of being a sink of contaminating iniquity; secondly, a man on leaving a criminal gaol, is not forced back into the ways of vice. If he relapse, it must be through determined wickedness: but relapses are very, very rare in the Grand Duchy—for happily those individuals are few who remain in the ways of crime for crime's sake! And now, my lord, you will perceive how far the framers of all these salutary enactments respecting prisoners and prison discipline, were indebted to the following passage in your speech:—'The criminal laws of England are only calculated to produce widely spread demoralization—to propagate vice—to render crime terribly prolific. A man no matter what his offence may have been—should be deemed innocent and untainted again, when he has paid the penalty of his misdeeds; because to brand a human being eternally, is to fly in the face of the Almighty and assert that there should be no such thing as forgiveness, and that there is no such thing as repentance. But the nature of punishments in England is to brand the individual, and so to dare the majesty of heaven. For the gaols are perfect nests of infamy—sinks of iniquity, imprisonment in which necessarily fastens an indelible stigma upon the individual. He either comes forth tainted; or else it is supposed that he must be so. Under these circumstances, he vainly endeavours to obtain em-

ployment; and, utterly failing in his attempt to earn an honest livelihood, he is compelled perforce to relapse into habits of crime and lawlessness. This fact accounts for an immense amount of the demoralization which the Bishops so much deplore, but the true causes of which they obstinately refuse to acknowledge. The criminal gaols are moral pest-houses, in which no cures are effected, but where the contagious malady becomes more virulent. Society should not immure offenders solely for the sake of punishment—but with a view to reformation of character.'

"Castledicala has the honour of having taken the initiative in all the great and glorious reforms which you suggested," said Mr. Hatfield, turning with admiration towards the Earl of Ellingham. "In England reform is much talked of; and when a small concession is made—for a concession it is in this country, to all intents and purposes—the people congratulate themselves as if their complete emancipation were at hand."

"There is a passage in the Earl's speech," resumed the Prince, "which particularly struck the Grand Duke and the Ministers when they were deliberating upon the proposed reforms and ameliorations to be introduced to the Chambers. That passage ran thus:—'When a poor man is oppressed by a rich one, it is vain and indelicate to assert that the Courts of Law are open to him: law is a luxury in which only those who possess ample means can indulge. In a case where some grievous injury is sustained by a poor man—the seduction of his wife or daughter, for instance—redress or recompense is impossible, unless some attorney takes up the case on speculation; and this is a practice most demoralizing and pernicious. But if left entirely unassisted in that respect, the poor man can no more go to Westminster Hall than he can afford to dine at Long's Hotel.'—Now in Castledicala, a plan has been adopted which seems to meet the difficulties set forth in the Earl of Ellingham's speech, and which does not involve the additional danger of rendering law so cheap as to encourage litigation in every paltry quarrel. To every Local Court are attached officers denominated the *Peoples' Attorneys-General*; and any poor man having a ground of complaint against a neighbour, addresses himself to one of those officers, who immediately examines into the affair, and if he see that the plaint be well founded, he prosecutes on behalf of the poor man. These officers are paid fixed salaries by the Government, and dare not take fees. They are selected with care, and are as incapable of bribery as the judges themselves;—and thus every means is taken to guarantee the poor man justice. Seduction and adultery are not made mere pecuniary matters in Castledicala: they are punished by imprisonment;—and the penalty is very heavy in a case where a rich man debauches a poor man's daughter. I now pass on to the subject of Education; and your treatment of this subject, my dear Earl, in your speech, is not the least remarkable portion of the oration. You declared that 'it was positively shocking to think that such care should be taken to convert negroes to Christianity thousands of miles off, while the most deplorable ignorance prevailed at home. The Church enjoys revenues the amount of which actually bring the ministers of the gospel into discredit, as evidencing their avaricious and grasping disposition;—while the people remain as uneducated as if not a single shilling were devoted to spiritual pastors or lay instructors.' You boldly 'accused both Houson

of Parliament and the upper classes generally of being anxious to keep the masses in a state of ignorance. Where instruction is imparted gratuitously, it is entirely of a sectarian nature; just as if men required to study grammar, history, arithmetic, or astronomy on Church of England principles. The whole land is over-run by clergymen, who live upon the fat of it—Universities and public schools have been richly endowed for the purpose of propagating knowledge and encouraging learning,—and yet the people are lamentably ignorant. It is a wicked and impudent falsehood to declare that they are intellectually dull or averse to mental improvement. Common sense—that best of sense—is the special characteristic of the working classes; and those who can read are absolutely greedy in their anxiety to procure books, newspapers, and cheap publications for perusal. The fact is, that the mind of the industrious population is a rich soil, wherein all good seed will speedily take root, shoot up, and bring forth fruit to perfection: but the apprehensions or narrow prejudices of the upper classes—the oligarchy—will not permit the seed to be sown. Now as the soil must naturally produce something, even of its own accord, it too often gives birth to rank weeds; and this is made a matter of scorn, reviling, and reproach. But the real objects of that scorn—that reviling—and that reproach, are those who obstinately and wickedly neglect to put the good soil to the full test of fertilisation.—All these observations," continued his Royal Highness, "were as applicable to Castelvicala a short time back as they have ever been and still are in England. But the reforms in the Church and in the Educational System were not the least important of those which characterised the new order of things. The two institutions were separated, and rendered entirely independent of each other, the Church being abandoned entirely to the voluntary principle, and the duty of educating the people being attached to the State, a Minister of Public Instruction being appointed. All sectarianism in education is now abolished: the system is entirely secular. The schoolmasters are appointed by the municipal corporations in the various localities, and their salaries are paid by the state. They are all laymen; for it is now a principle established in the Grand Duchy that parents shall train up their children in the creed which they may prefer. Thus Protestants, Catholics, and Jews all receive the blessings and benefits of the secular education; no tampering with religious opinions—no proselytism being permitted. The whole scheme is on the broadest basis of liberality; and the people are delighted with its working. As for the Church, it is entirely separated from the State; and the order of Bishops has been suppressed. The Catholic religion is still that of the great majority: but it is shorn of its pomp; and ecclesiastical ostentation and vain display have received a blow which they will never recover. The result is, that the Christian creed has been restored to something resembling its primitive simplicity, and such as its Divine Founder intended. I have now, my lord and gentlemen, given you a hasty, but I hope intelligible sketch of the condition of Castelvicala at the present day; and it only remains for me to sum up the reforms which have been accomplished, and which completely carry out the views and the theories so ably propounded by you, my dear Earl, nineteen years ago. In the first place, there is a Throne surrounded by Republican Institutions; and the hereditary principle as well as the law of pri-

mogeniture have been annihilated—never to be revived. Then, we have adopted 'a *minimum* rate of wages, to prevent the sudden fluctuation of such wages, and to compel property to give constant employment to labour:—indirect taxes upon the necessities of life have been abolished;—the laws and their administration are equitably proportioned to the relative conditions of the rich and the poor;—a general system of national education has been established, and intrusted to laymen, totally distinct from religious instruction and sectarian tenets;—a complete reformation in the system of prison discipline has taken place; and establishments have been founded for the purpose of affording work to persons upon leaving criminal gaols, as a means of their obtaining an honest livelihood and retrieving their characters prior to seeking employment for themselves;—and the franchise has been so extended as to give every man who earns his own bread by the sweat of his brow, a stake and interest in the country's welfare.'"

The Prince ceased speaking; and those who had been his auditors expressed their sincerest thanks for the gratifying explanations he had given them with so much readiness and affability. Nor less were they charmed to find that a truly liberal and enlightened system of policy would stand such remarkable tests, and work so well. The question, whether the nations of Europe are civilised enough to receive Republican Institutions, was completely solved, to their satisfaction; and even Sir John Lascelles, who was somewhat tainted with the doctrines of the Old School, acknowledged himself to be a convert.

The party then joined the ladies in the drawing-room; where political subjects gave way to discourse upon less serious topics;—and when the company took their departure, the inmates of the lordly mansion did not separate to retire to their respective chambers until they had exchanged many enthusiastic comments upon the character, disposition, talents, and bearing of his Royal Highness, the Prince of Montoni.

CHAPTER CXXXIV.

A PAINFUL SCENE.

WE deemed it advisable to break as little as possible, by comment or extraneous explanation, the thread of the Prince of Montoni's discourse upon the reform that had been introduced into the Grand Duchy of Castelvicala. We therefore refrained from giving any account of the manner in which Charles Hatfield listened, and received—or rather, greedily drank in—the narrative of his Royal Highness.

To say that the young man heard with enthusiasm, were to convey but a feeble idea of his emotions as he hung upon every sentence—every word that fell from the lips of the Earl's illustrious guests:—when, however, we declare that even Perdita's image fell into the back-ground of his mind, during the whole time that the Prince was discoursing, our readers may form some notion of the nature of that impression which was made upon him.

On retiring to his chamber at about one o'clock in the morning, Charles Hatfield thought not of seeking his couch: but, throwing himself into an arm-chair, he gave way to the agitating—conflicting—turbulent ideas which had been excited in his soul.

"The modesty of the Prince," he thought, "concealed the fact that nearly all the reforms which he detailed, were suggested by himself. Oh! what would I give to be enabled to raise myself to eminence in

the world! Twenty years of my life?—Ah! yes—willingly—willingly would I yield up a quarter of my probable existence to gain a name, honoured and renowned as that of the Prince of Montoni! And is not rank within my grasp? Can I not in a moment—by the waving of my hand, as it were—place upon my brow the coronet of a Viscount? May I not yet stand before the world as the heir-apparent to the Earldom of Ellingham? Yes:—and if once I find my way into the supreme legislative assembly, shall I not be enabled to advocate the cause of the People, and obtain a glorious renown? It were trilling with my own interests—it were wronging myself, to abstain from asserting my just rights! If my father choose to remain a simple commoner and allow his younger brother to wear the honours and hold the estates of a proud Earldom, am I to be bound by his will? No—no: and my father acts not a parent's part towards me in thus keeping me in obscurity. 'Tis clear that my sire's early life renders him desirous to shun all circumstances that may attract attention towards him: 'tis clear—my God! how dreadful to think of!—'tis clear, I say, that he feels the impropriety of a highwayman laying claim to a lordly title! Oh! the sins of the father are indeed visited on the child in my case! But I am innocent: my life has been spotless and pure—my character is untarnished. Wherefore should I suffer for my parent's crimes? It is unjust—most unjust; and even filial duty, in its best and holiest sense, cannot compel me to renounce the distinctions to which by birth I am the heir! No—no: a young man of my ambition—my talents—my feelings—my burning hopes, must not immolate himself for the sake of a father who acts unjustly towards him. For how stands the case between us? The question is whether a parent should make any and every sacrifice for his child; or whether the child must make all possible sacrifices for his father. In asserting his rights, claiming his title, and thereby enabling me to assume my own, he doubtless would have to make a sacrifice: he must declare who he is—my God!—the Resuscitated Highwayman! But, on the other hand, in consenting to keep his secret, do I not willfully blind myself to my own interests—wantonly thrust aside those opportunities of gaining distinction and acquiring renown which are within my reach—crush with suicidal hand the glorious aspirations which I have formed—and purposely trample on all the hopes that are developing themselves before me?"

Charles Hatfield rose—paced the room in an agitated manner—then, reseating himself, again plunged into his ominous reflections.

"I have read that those who yield to the influence of false sentimentalism, never rise in the world. He who would attain to the pinnacle of eminence must harden his heart,—even as did Napoleon, when he put away from him that charming Josephine who loved him with such pure and fervid devotion. Yes—family, kith, and kindred must be sacrificed—all sacrificed—by him who follows the dictates of his ambition. And yet—and yet, did not Richard Markham rise by his virtues, as much as by his talents and heroism, to that eminence which enabled him to take his place amongst the mightiest Princes of Europe? Oh! but he had opportunities which may never occur again; he is the one in the thousand whom Fortune takes by the hand. If I remain obscure—unknown—plain Mr. Charles Hatfield—I am but an unit amidst the millions which constitute the mass called the People.

But if I suddenly stand forth as a Viscount, and the heir of a wealthy Earldom, shall I not at once be placed in a position to carve out a career for myself? Oh! how glorious—how thrilling would it be, to have the power of saying to my Perdita, '*Beautiful angel! I am not the obscure young man I appear to be: in me behold Viscount Marston, the heir to the Earldom of Ellingham!*' Ah! Perdita, then would you feel honoured in my love—and I should not be compelled to evince my gratitude to thee for loving me! Charming, adorable Perdita—thine image is coupled with the bright dream of ambition that now animates me;—for when I shall have distinguished myself in the Senate, how delicious will it be to see thee welcome with pride and admiration my return to thine arms,—to behold thy fine eyes fixed upon me, eloquently proclaiming how proud thou art to own the love of a man who is filling the world with his fame! Yes—I must assert my rights:—but how? Oh! I will confide all to Perdita—and she possesses a mind so strong and an intellect so powerful, that she will assist me with her counsel in this difficulty. And it will be so sweet to receive advice from her lips—so delightful to mark the interest which she will take in my affairs!"

Again he rose from his seat: for a sudden thought had struck him—accompanied by a severe pang,—a pang that went through his heart like a barbed arrow.

"My mother!—my poor mother!" he murmured to himself: "Oh! what a blow will it be to her if I compel my father—compel her husband—to assert his claims to the Earldom of Ellingham! And yet—was I not for years neglected by her?—did she care for me—did she even have me to dwell with her during my infancy? No—no: I was abandoned to the woman Watts;—and had I become a thief in the streets—a prowling, houseless vagabond—my mother would have been to blame!"

Thus was it that this young man, having imbibed from Perdita the art and facility of sophistical reasoning,—thus was it that he crushed all the naturally generous feelings of his soul, and struggled desperately to subdue the promptings of his really good disposition.

Love and ambition produced these baneful effects!

But his love,—was it a pure and honest love inspired by a virtuous being?—or was it a frenzy engendered and sustained by a depraved and designing woman endowed with the most glorious beauty?

And his ambition,—was it that fine spirit of emulation which warms the generous heart, and prompts the enlightened mind to seek distinction for the sake of being enabled, by means of influence and high position, to benefit the human race?—or was it a selfish craving after rank and power, in order to enjoy the sweets of applause, become the object of servile flattery, and obtain the honour ever shown in this country to sounding titles and proud aristocracy?

The reader can answer these questions for himself.

Having passed nearly two hours in the wild reverie which suggested schemes so menacing in their nature to his own and his parents' happiness, Charles Hatfield retired to rest;—and in his dreams he beheld a variety of scenes and images, incongruously grouped and confusedly jumbled together, the voluptuous form of Perdita stretched in a witching undress on the sofa, and extending her arms to welcome him to her embraces, the Marshal Prince of Montoni, seated on horseback, surrounded by a brilliant staff,—thousands and thousands of persons gathered together to witness

the passing of a gay cavalcade, of which he fancied himself to be the leader as well as the hero of the occasion,—and then his father and mother kneeling and weeping at his feet, and proffering some prayer to which he refused to accede. Then he thought that he was roving in a delicious garden, where the singing of birds, the hues of the flowers, and the fragrance of aromatic shrubs made everything delightful to the senses, and where Perdita was his companion. She appeared to be clad in the loose and scanty drapery which heathen goddesses are represented to wear,—fastened by a clasp on the left shoulder, flowing so as to leave the right bosom entirely bare, and confined by a zone to the waist. Airily, airily they tripped along together, until they beheld a temple standing at a distance: then Perdita suddenly assumed the majesty of a queen—and conducting her lover to a shrine within the temple, made him kneel down while she crowned him with a wreath of flowers, while unseen minstrels poured forth a strain of delicious music.

Under the influence of this last dream he awoke;—and the image of Perdita still remained uppermost in his mind.

Then as he performed the functions of the toilette, he reconsidered all the arguments and plans—repeated to himself all the sophistical reasoning—into which he had fallen before he retired to rest;—and, hardening his heart in respect to his parents,—yes, and hardening it, too, with regard to Lady Frances Ellingham,—he resolved to sacrifice all and everything to the two idols of his soul—ambition and Perdita!

In this frame of mind he descended to the breakfast parlour, where the Earl and Countess of Ellingham, Lady Frances, Mr. Hatfield, and Lady Georgiana were already assembled. Charles assumed as gay an appearance as possible: for he was resolved to mask his knowledge of all the family secrets as well as his sinister designs, until he should have consulted with Perdita. But in spite of himself, there was a certain constraint and embarrassment in his manner when he spoke to Lady Frances; and this artless, beautiful young creature surveyed him with astonishment and grief.

The fact was that the heart of Charles Hatfield smote him for the vile and perfidious part he had enacted towards his cousin; and he scarcely dared to look her in the face.

Her parents and his own, as well as she herself noticed the peculiarity of his demeanour in this respect; and Lady Georgiana was so affected by his apparent coolness towards the Earl's daughter that it was with difficulty she could restrain herself from questioning him then and there on the subject. A hasty whisper, however, from her husband sealed her tongue and gave her the assurance that he would soon ascertain the cause of their son's altered behaviour towards the young lady who was already looked upon as his future wife.

Accordingly, when the morning repast was concluded, Mr. Hatfield beckoned his son to follow him to the library; and now Charles was struck with a sudden fear—conscience exciting the apprehension that his schemings were discovered, and seen through by an outraged, indignant father.

On entering the library, Mr. Hatfield motioned him to take a seat near him: then, fixing his eyes upon the young man's countenance, he said, "Charles, has any misunderstanding occurred between Lady Frances and yourself?"

"No—not that I am aware of," returned Charles,

considerably relieved by the question that indicated the nature of the colloquy which it opened. "Wherefore should you entertain such an idea?"

"Because your manner towards Lady Frances at the breakfast-table was cool, constrained, and embarrassed," said Mr. Hatfield. "She herself noticed the circumstance; and I observed that Lord and Lady Ellingham were pained by it likewise. As for your mother, Charles—she was deeply grieved; and I was both hurt and annoyed."

"I am sorry, my dear father—but—but, I was not aware of any difference in my demeanour towards her ladyship," stammered Charles, unskilled as yet in the arts of duplicity and guile.

"My son—my dear son, do not attempt to deceive me!" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, emphatically. "Lady Frances, in the artlessness of her soul—in the confiding candour of her amiable nature—yesterday acquainted her mother, the Countess of Ellingham, with all that had taken place between yourself and her in the morning. You made her an offer of your hand, in pursuance of the counsel which I gave you;—and her parents will cheerfully yield an assent to your suit. Indeed, the Earl expected to see you on the subject yesterday afternoon; but it appears that immediately after your interview with Lady Frances, you went out and remained absent for some hours. How you dispose of your time, it is not for me to enquire: you are of an age when you are entitled to be your own master. But this I implore of you,—lose no time in seeking a private interview with the Earl, and soliciting him to accord you the hand of his daughter. 'Tis a mere ceremony which a parent, and a personage of his standing, naturally expects you to perform;—and I promise you that there is no chance of a refusal."

"My dear father," said Charles, the natural candour of his nature asserting its empire; "I was too hasty in proposing to Lady Frances. Would to God that I could recall the step I thus rashly took!"

Mr. Hatfield surveyed his son in profound astonishment for nearly a minute: then, breaking forth indignantly, he exclaimed, "What, sir! you have dared to trifle with the affections of an amiable and accomplished girl?—you decline a match which is so desirable in every point of view, and on which your mother's heart is set?"

"I must decline the honour of this alliance," answered the young man, speaking with a courage which even surprised himself.

"Do you know, Charles," demanded his father, with an utterance almost suffocated by indescribable emotions,—“do you know that your conduct is that of a villain? And shall it be said that you—*you*, a young man of whom such lofty expectations have been formed—"

"By whom have these expectations been formed?" suddenly cried the rebellious son, his choler rising as all his wrongs, real or imaginary, rushed to his mind,—those wrongs which he believed himself to have received and to be still enduring at the hands of his parents.

"By whom?" repeated Mr. Hatfield much pained by the tone, words, and manner of the young man. "By whom should such hopes be experienced, save by your parents?"

"My parents!" cried Charles, with withering irony. "Wherefore am I not acknowledged as your son?—why do you not proclaim yourselves to be my parents? Was not the discovery on my part a matter of mere chance?—and should I not have been kept for ever



ignorant of the fact, had not an accident revealed it to me?"

"Oh! my God!—this is retribution!" murmured Mr. Hatfield, bowing himself down, and covering his face with his hands.

At that moment the door opened—and Lady Georgiana, pale as death and scarcely able to support herself on her tottering limbs, made her appearance.

Unable to endure the state of suspense in which she had been plunged relative to the altered manner of her son towards Lady Frances at the breakfast-table,—and having a vague presentiment that some unpleasant scene was occurring between him and her husband in the library,—she had determined to repair thither and relieve herself at once from an uncertainty that was intolerable. But upon reaching the door she heard Charles talking loudly and bitterly: she instinctively paused;—and those terrible questions which he addressed to his father, smote upon *her* ear like the voice of the Angel of Death.

Staggering into the room, she mechanically closed the door behind her; and then leant against it for support. Her fine—her handsome countenance denoted the most poignant anguish: it was absolutely distorted—while a frightful pallor overspread it.

"My mother—my dear mother!" exclaimed Charles, bounding towards her;—for his soul was touched by the pitiable appearance which she presented to his view.

"Just heaven! Charles—what have you said to your father!" she asked, in a tone of despair;—and flinging herself into her son's arms, she gave vent to a flood of tears.

"I implore your pardon, my dear parents, if in a moment of haste and impatience I said aught that can give you offence," exclaimed the young man: "but I was not master of my emotions—for you, my father, had termed me a *villain*."

"Let us not recriminate," said Mr. Hatfield, rising and taking his son by the hand, Lady Georgiana having in the meantime sunk into the chair to which Charles conducted her. "I was wrong to address you thus harshly: but your refusal to form an alliance with Lady Frances, to whom you only yesterday imparted a confession of attachment——"

"O Charles! is it possible that your parents are to experience such bitterness of disappointment as this?" exclaimed Lady Georgiana, turning a look of appeal—of earnest appeal—upon her son. "You know not how profound will be my sorrow if you thus enact a perfidious part towards Lady Frances Ellingham!"

"Would you have me wed where my heart is not fixed?" demanded Charles, warmly. "I laboured under a delusion: I fancied that I loved Lady Frances as one whom I should wish to make my wife—but I now find that it was only with the affection of a brother or of a very sincere friend that I in reality regarded her! Yesterday morning you, my dear father, entered my chamber, at a moment when the confusion of ideas caused by unpleasant dreams was scarcely dissipated;—you urged me to confess an attachment to Lady Frances—to seek her hand;—and I obeyed you! But I acted under an impulse for which I could not account;—I yielded to some unknown influence which I could not resist. And yet it was not love, my dear parents;—no—it was not love! In making Lady Frances my wife, I should only ensure the unhappiness of an excellent—a beautiful—an accomplished girl——"

"You admit all her admirable qualities, Charles," interrupted his mother; "and yet you refuse to avail yourself of an opportunity to secure so precious a prize—to link your fortunes with one who is certain to make the best of wives!"

"It is truly incomprehensible!" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, whose knowledge of the world and large experience of the human heart convinced him that there was something more at the bottom of his son's conduct than the alleged reasons for so abruptly breaking off a match that, he thought, must appear in every way so eligible and advantageous to the young man.

"My dear parents, this scene is most painful to us all," said Charles, who, glancing rapidly at the time-piece upon the mantel, saw that the hour was approaching for him to visit Perdita.

His father, observing that impatient look cast towards the clock, instantly comprehended that his son had some appointment to keep; and connecting this discovery with the strangeness of his conduct in respect to Lady Frances, it flashed to his mind in a moment that the young man had formed some attachment elsewhere.

"Charles," he accordingly said, turning abruptly towards his son and looking him full in the face, "you love another?"

The young man became red as scarlet, and stammered out a few unintelligible words, which his father soon cut short.

"Now we have discovered the truth! But surely you have formed no unworthy attachment?—surely you cannot love one whom you are ashamed to name?" cried Mr. Hatfield.

"Speak, Charles—speak! Answer your father!" said Lady Georgiana, in an imploring tone, as she perceived her son turn away towards the mantel.

For rebellious thoughts again rose in the mind of the young man;—and he felt hurt and vexed that his conduct should thus be questioned by parents who never had acknowledged him as their son until the necessity was forced upon them by his accidental discovery of the secret of his birth, and who now kept him out of what he conceived to be his just rights. Moreover, was he not twenty-five years old?—and was that an age at which he should thus be tutored and treated like a child? Lastly, it was verging fast upon twelve; and had he not assured his Perdita that he would not be a minute later than mid-day?

"Charles, why do you not answer me?" asked Mr. Hatfield, approaching him: "wherefore do you treat your parents with contempt?"

"Wherefore did my parents treat me with such unnatural neglect as to bring me up as their nephew?"

demanding the young man, turning abruptly—almost savagely round upon his father. "Wherefore do they now pass me off to the world in that latter capacity?" he cried, becoming fearfully excited.

Lady Georgiana uttered a faint scream, covered her face with her hands, and fell back in her chair sobbing bitterly.

"You speak of unnatural conduct!" cried Mr. Hatfield, growing excited in his turn. "Tell me at once, Charles—do you mean to throw off all allegiance to your parents? If so—remember that it is in our power to deprive you of the immense fortune which is otherwise destined for you——"

"Ah! menaces!" ejaculated the young man: and darting upon his father a look of mingled regret and anger—of united sorrow and indignation,—a look so strange, so ominous that Mr. Hatfield started with horror,—he rushed from the room.

"Stay! stay!" cried Lady Georgiana, springing towards the door.

But her son heeded her not: he obeyed not her voice;—and the unhappy mother sank upon the floor, gasping for utterance, and feeling as if her heart would break with the wretched sensations that filled her bosom.

Mr. Hatfield hastened to raise his wife—to place her in a chair—and to breathe words of consolation in her ears.

When she was somewhat recovered, she clasped her hands convulsively together; and, looking up appealingly into his face, said, "Is this a reality? or is it a dream?"

"Alas! it is a terrible reality," responded Mr. Hatfield, in a tone of mingled bitterness and sorrow.

"And what can it all mean?" asked Lady Georgiana, wildly: for she was bewildered by the strangeness of her son's conduct—amazed by the sudden alteration of his manner from respect to insolent indifference towards his parents.

"Heaven alone can solve that question for us at present," returned her husband. "Can it be that he has learnt any thing—that he suspects aught of the past? No—no: that is impossible! But ever since the discovery of his real parentage, he has been altered;—sometimes moody and thoughtful—at others petulant and hasty,—now unnaturally gay and excited—then deeply depressed and melancholy,—but never unruly and overbearing, disobedient and rebellious, as he has shown himself this forenoon."

"Tis easy to perceive, I fear, that he is troubled by the mystery which induced us to conceal his position with regard to us," said Lady Georgiana;—"and likewise—yes, likewise," she added hesitatingly, "the circumstance that he still passes as our nephew weighs upon his mind!"

"Oh! this is a terrible retribution for my sins!—an awful punishment for the foul misdeeds of my earlier years!" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, wringing his hands bitterly.

"My dear husband," said Lady Georgiana, whose turn it now was to console; "give not way thus to your sorrow! Let us hope that he will repent of this strange unruliness of conduct——"

"Alas! I have sad forebodings of evil!" cried the unhappy man. "I fear that he has formed some unworthy connexion, Georgiana: but let us dissemble our sorrow—let us not afflict the Earl and the amiable Esther by giving them any account of the occurrences of this day."

"And yet what can we say respecting the union

that was contemplated between their amiable daughter and our son?" demanded Lady Georgiana, in an anxious tone.

"We will by some means find an excuse for the embarrassment and coldness of manner which Charles exhibited at the breakfast-table," returned Mr. Hatfield; "and I will seek the earliest opportunity to reason with him fully and calmly upon the subject."

"If he should have formed an attachment elsewhere—"

"That is scarcely probable, when we come to look calmly at the matter—since he yesterday morning declared his affection to Frances."

"Alas! 'tis a mystery which pains and alarms me," said Lady Georgiana.

"A mystery which I will penetrate, my dear wife!" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, in a resolute—almost stern tone of voice. "But for the present, it is useless to hazard a conjecture."

CHAPTER CXXXV.

CHARLES HATFIELD AND MRS. FITZHARDINGE.

It was a little after twelve o'clock when Charles Hatfield reached the house in Suffolk Street.

"Is Miss Fitzhardinge at home?" he enquired of the female servant who answered his summons at the door.

"Have the kindness to walk up into the drawing-room, sir," was the response; and, with beating heart, the young man followed the domestic into the apartment where he expected again to behold his beautiful Perdita.

But, to his disappointment—a disappointment which he could not conceal, he found himself in the presence of her mother.

"Be seated, sir," she said, coldly and formally indicating a chair, into which Charles Hatfield fell as if in obedience to the command of a witch. "I have many matters whereon to converse with you; and, to speak candidly, scarcely know how to commence. One subject personally regards you: another intimately relates to my own interests. But I will begin with that which so nearly concerns yourself."

"I am all attention, madam," said Charles, endeavouring to assume as respectful a demeanour as possible, but in reality glancing with much impatience towards the door—as if by his eager looks inviting the entrance of Perdita.

"My daughter will not interrupt us, Mr. Hatfield," exclaimed Mrs. Fitzhardinge, with an affectation of malice which seemed ominous and foreboding to the young man. "Indeed, whether you will ever see her again, depends upon the result of our present interview."

"My God! madam," cried Charles, in an imploring tone; "have I offended your beautiful daughter—or yourself?"

"I am not precisely offended, Mr. Hatfield," said the old woman, assuming a more conciliatory manner: "but certain explanations are necessary between us;—and indeed, it depends entirely on yourself whether you ever behold Perdita again."

"Then I shall behold her again, madam," returned Charles, emphatically. "And now I can really listen to you with attention—"

"And perhaps with patience," added Mrs. Fitzhardinge, her rigid features at length relaxing into a faint

smile. "But I will not tax that patience longer than I can help. Firstly, then, we are to speak of the matters which concern yourself. And now—will you not be surprised when I assure you that I am acquainted with many strange and marvellous secrets connected with your family?"

"Ah!" ejaculated Charles, starting.

"But perhaps I even know more than you yourself are acquainted with?" said Mrs. Fitzhardinge.

"No, madam—no: that is impossible!" he cried, emphatically.

"Do any of those secrets give you pain to contemplate?" she asked, fixing her eyes searchingly upon him. "Pardon me for thus questioning you—"

"And why, madam, do you so question me?" he demanded, almost angrily.

"Because I am as yet ignorant to what extent your knowledge may go in certain respects," she replied.

"Then believe me, madam—believe me," cried Charles Hatfield, bitterly, "when I assure you that I know much more than you can possibly have an idea of?"

"Is the name of Rainford familiar to you?" asked the old woman, steadily watching the effect of her question.

"Madam," exclaimed Charles, starting from his seat, and approaching Mrs. Fitzhardinge in a threatening manner, "would you taunt me with the infamy of my birth?—for I see that it is no secret to you! But imagine not—if such indeed be your idea—that I am unworthy the love of your daughter Perdita! You were about to marry her to an old nobleman: what if a young nobleman were to demand her hand?"

"A young nobleman!" ejaculated Mrs. Fitzhardinge, now surprised in her turn: for it must be remembered that all she knew concerning the present subject was gleaned from the musings of the old gipsy; and those musings had led her to believe that Charles was the nephew of Mr. Hatfield, *alias* Thomas Rainford.

"Yes—madam—a young nobleman!" he repeated, carried away by the excitement of feelings under which he laboured: for he fancied that the old lady had intended to reproach him—*him*, the son of the resuscitated highwayman—with having dared to love her daughter. "And now, perhaps, it is your turn to be surprised: for, as surely as you are seated there, I am not the plain, and humble, and obscure Charles Hatfield—but the *Lord Viscount Marston*, heir to the Earldom of Ellingham!"

Mrs. Fitzhardinge restrained her surprise with the utmost presence of mind—exerting indeed an extraordinary power of self-control; and, surveying him with an unblushing effrontery, she said, "Well, my lord, your lordship is at length led to confess who you really are!"

"My lord"—"your lordship!"—Oh! how sweetly—how sweetly sounded those words on the ears of Charles Hatfield:—he forgot that he was the son of the resuscitated highwayman—he remembered not that his sire had passed through the ordeal of a scaffold: he heard only that he was saluted with a title of nobility; and already did it seem as if half his ambition were gratified.

"Madam," he said, at length recovering his self-possession, and subduing as much as possible the wildness of that joy which had seized upon him, "then it appears you were acquainted with my right to a title of nobility?"

"I was," she answered, with an air of the most perfect truthfulness: "and believing *you* to be ignorant

of that fact, I was anxious to make the revelation to your lordship."

"You are consequently acquainted with every thing that regards me?" continued Charles, not perceiving, in the still elated condition of his mind, that the question was foolish because it embraced a vague and undefined generality.

"Every thing, my lord," returned Mrs. Fitzhardinge, repeating the titular appellation, because in her latent shrewdness she saw full well the pleasure that its swelling sound afforded to the young man.

"This is most strange—most singular!" cried Charles, musing audibly: "for I came hither with the intention of revealing all—every thing—to your Perdita, through whom you would have learnt the entire particulars in the course of this day;—and, behold! I am anticipated—for you already are as well acquainted with those most mysterious circumstances as I myself! But may I ask, madam," he exclaimed, turning abruptly towards Mrs. Fitzhardinge,—"may I ask how you came to know that Mr. Hatfield is my father, and that he is the rightful Earl of Ellingham, legitimately born?"

Mrs. Fitzhardinge had hitherto known nothing at all of those circumstances; but, without manifesting the least surprise, she said, "Pray be seated, my lord—compose yourself—give not way to unnecessary excitement; and I will at once proceed to explain all my conduct to your lordship."

Charles Hatfield threw himself into an arm-chair, and showed a disposition to listen with attention.

"Has your lordship ever heard of a gipsy named Miranda?" enquired Mrs. Fitzhardinge.

"Yes: I lately read the entire history of that Octavia Manners who became Countess of Ellingham, and who was my father's mother. The gipsy of whom you speak was her faithful friend: but she must now be very old—even if she be in existence!"

"She *is* in existence—or at least was a short time back," said Mrs. Fitzhardinge. "From her lips did I receive the entire history of your family."

"But she could not have known that the late Earl of Ellingham married the injured Octavia Manners," cried Charles: "she could not have been aware of my father's real rank and position."

"Yes—she knew all," returned the wily woman, uttering a deliberate falsehood: "how and by what means, it matters not—neither, indeed, did she inform me. When the whole tale was revealed to me, I thought that you must be in ignorance of your just rights; and, having by accident heard a good account of your lordship's generous heart and amiable qualities——"

"From whom?" demanded Charles.

"Oh! I must not gratify your curiosity in these minute details," exclaimed Mrs. Fitzhardinge. "Suffice it that, I adhere to the important points of our present topic."

"Proceed, madam: I will not again interrupt you unnecessarily," said the young man.

"Well, then, my lord—I fancied that it was a flagrant shame and an abhorrent cruelty thus to retain you in ignorance, as I supposed, of your true standing in the world; and a sense of justice determined me—although a total stranger to you—to acquaint your lordship with those facts which, it however appears, were already well known to you."

"To speak candidly, my dear madam," said Charles, "I *was* in complete ignorance of all those circumstances until eight or ten days ago, when they were

revealed to me by the strangest accident in the world."

"May I, without appearing indiscreet, enquire the nature of the accident that thus put your lordship in possession of such important—such vitally important facts?"

"Assuredly, my dear madam," returned Charles Hatfield. "You yourself have behaved to me with so much kindness and candour in this respect, that I owe you my entire confidence. A mere chance threw in my way certain papers which fully prove that Octavia Manners was the wife of the late Earl of Ellingham when their child was born; and that my own father, who now bears the name of Hatfield, but who was so long and so unhappily known by that of Rainford, was the child to whom allusion is made."

"And those papers—have you them in your possession?" asked Mrs. Fitzhardinge.

"I have—carefully concealed in a private compartment of my writing-desk, in my own chamber at Lord Ellingham's mansion."

"But has your lordship no hesitation in proclaiming your rights and titles—or rather in acquiring them by forcing your father to proclaim his own?" demanded the old woman, again fixing her eyes steadfastly upon his countenance.

"Ah! *there*, madam, you touch the wound in my heart!" exclaimed Charles, the sudden workings of his countenance displaying the anguish which the thought excited within him. "I am loth to take the grand—the important—the irrevocable step on the one hand; and I cannot bear to surrender up all my privileges on the other. Moreover, my parents have not acted towards me in a way to render necessary every sacrifice on my part;—and even this morning—this very morning—my father added a new injury to the list of those already committed against me—a new wrong, by upbraiding me, under particular circumstances, with harshness—even brutality."

"Certainly your lordship cannot permit a false sense of filial duty to mar all the golden prospects which open before you!" exclaimed the vile woman, who was thus encouraging evil thoughts in the young man's mind. "Consider your youth—your handsome appearance—your great talents—the brilliant hopes which develop themselves in the horizon of the future——"

"Oh! I have thought of all this—I have weighed every thing for and against the course which I long to adopt, but which the interests of my parents oppose——"

Charles paused—dashed his hand against his heated brow—and, rising, paced the room in an agitated manner.

"My lord, this excitement is useless," said Mrs. Fitzhardinge. "If you will deign to consider me as a friend——"

"I do—I do!" he cried, approaching her, and pressing her shrivelled hand with fervent, but oh! with how mistaken gratitude: "have you not proved yourself my friend? Did you not, though a stranger, contemplate the generous act of revealing to me secrets which you considered as necessary to be known to me? And have you not even now given me advice which is consistent with my interests?"

"Then, if your lordship will thus regard me as a friend, permit me to suggest that you do not on the one hand abandon your determination to assert your rights, nor on the other adopt any course that has not been well deliberated upon. Consider," said Mrs.

Fitzhardinge, "your lordship will have to steel your heart against a father's prayers—a mother's tears: you will have to contend against the entreaties of your uncle, the Earl—and of his handsome Jewish wife,—aye—and the beseechings of their daughter too;—for I understand that your lordship has a beautiful cousin——"

"Oh! how many hearts may I not have to break in piling up the fabric of my ambition!" exclaimed Charles Hatfield, his heart once more smiting him severely,—or rather with an anguish that was intolerable.

"Yes—those are the considerations which lie before your lordship," resumed Mrs. Fitzhardinge. "But you must also reflect, my lord, upon the immense interests you have at stake. Is it better to remain simple *Charles Hatfield* all your life—or——"

"You need not finish the question, madam," said the young man, suddenly interrupting the infamous old harridan, and now speaking in a cold tone of desperate resolution. "I must persevere: my destiny is fixed—and even if hearts break in the struggle, I will not shrink from the contest that is to give me my just rights! But let us talk no more of this for the present. May I be permitted to enquire after your charming daughter——"

"You have now, my lord, turned the conversation on the second subject which required discussion between us," interrupted Mrs. Fitzhardinge. "Perdita has confessed to me all that has taken place between herself and your lordship——"

"And you are doubtless offended!" exclaimed Charles Hatfield, observing that the old lady's countenance had again become very serious.

"No, my lord—I am not precisely angry," she returned; "but I tremble to approach a topic which involves so many difficulties."

"Ah! madam—with your strong mind, all difficulties are surmountable," said Charles. "and you have only to stipulate, in order that I shall assent to every thing that you may propose."

"In the first place," resumed the wily woman, "you are aware of the strange—fanciful—and, I must say, unfortunate notions which my daughter has imbibed relative to marriage; and your lordship must be aware that—supposing your mutual passion be allowed to take its course unrestrained—the world will regard her only as your lordship's mistress!"

"Madam—I would cheerfully conduct her to the altar——"

"Whither she will not go," added the old woman, emphatically. "No—my lord, it is useless to reason with that strong-headed, obstinate girl on the subject. Admitting, then, that I—her mother—placing her happiness above conventional opinions, and entertaining implicit faith in your honour and integrity,—admitting, I say, that I consent to the union of hearts proposed in this case,—waiving the ceremony of the union of hands,—can you, my lord, undertake to ensure my daughter against the contingencies of poverty?"

"Situated as I now am, the means at my disposal are limited indeed," said Charles Hatfield: "but the moment my rights are proclaimed and recognised——"

"Then, at the same instant, the family estates, at present held by the Earl of Ellingham, will pass into the hands of your father—and you still remain totally dependant upon him until his death," said Mrs. Fitzhardinge, embracing at a glance the whole range of contingencies.

"True!" cried Charles, suddenly becoming much

embarrassed, and seeing difficulties most unexpectedly start up.

"But," resumed Mrs. Fitzhardinge, after a few minutes' pause, and laying strong emphasis upon the monosyllable,—"*but*, my lord, even should you immediately quarrel with your father by compelling him to wrest the titles and estates from the hands of his younger brother who now holds them, there are ways and means for your lordship to raise money—those estates becoming inalienably your's in the perspective."

"Yes—I understand—there is that alternative!" exclaimed Charles. "But my father would not discard me altogether—he would not deprive me of the means of support during his life-time——"

"You know not, my lord, what may be the results of the family convulsion—the domestic revolution—which your contemplated proceedings will bring about. Pardon me, my dear Viscount, if I thus dwell upon matters so purely worldly;—but remember that I myself am now placed in a cruel position by the total wreck of the brilliant hopes which my claims in Chancery so recently held out;—and unless I succeed in raising a few thousand pounds within a week, I shall positively be menaced with imprisonment in a debtors' gaol."

"Merciful heaven!" cried Charles Hatfield: "how can I possibly assist you?"

"You will not think me mercenary, my lord——"

"Oh! no—no, my dear madam!" he exclaimed impatiently. "Tell me if there be a means of raising the amount you require; and my readiness to adopt those means must be received by you as a proof of my anxiety to render myself worthy of Perdita's love and your esteem."

"Generous nobleman!" cried Mrs. Fitzhardinge, pretending to be affected by the scene: "my daughter will indeed be happy in the possession of your heart! Listen, my lord," she continued; "and our interview may soon be brought to a close—for I know that you are as anxious to see a certain person as she is dying to behold you. Your lordship ere now alluded to particular papers which prove the legitimate birth, rights, and identity of your father:—by means of those papers, and on your lordship signing a document, I can undertake to procure as large a sum of money as may be required either by my necessities or for your own present wants."

"This evening, my dear madam, I will place the papers in your hands," said Charles, who was anxious to terminate this interview as speedily as possible—for his impatience to behold Perdita began to exceed his powers of endurance.

"At eight o'clock this evening I shall expect your lordship," observed Mrs. Fitzhardinge: and, with these words, she quitted the apartment.

Charles Hatfield approached the mirror—arranged his hair in the most becoming manner—and had just snatched a last satisfactory glance at the reflection of his handsome countenance, when the door opened and Perdita entered the room.

CHAPTER CXXXVI.

INFATUATION.

PERDITA was dressed in a more modest and, to speak truly, in a more delicate manner than on either of the former occasions when Charles had seen her. A faint

morning gown, made with a high corsage, set off her fine figure, without affording even a glimpse of the charms the full proportions of which its shape developed. Her hair was arranged in plain bands; and there was altogether an appearance of so much innocence, candour, and maiden reserve in her demeanour, that it seemed to Charles as if he now beheld in her some new phasis of her wondrous beauty.

Hastening forward to meet her, he caught her in his arms and covered her lips, her cheeks, and her brow with kisses: for—whether it were imagination or reality we know not—but she appeared to be far more lovely than ever in his eyes.

"Dearest—dearest Perdita!" he exclaimed, forgetting at that moment all and every thing in the world save the object of his adoration.

"Charles—my lord—how am I to call you henceforth?" she murmured, in that soft, musical tone which flowed like the harmony of the spheres in unto the very soul.

"Am I not *Charles* to you, dear girl?" he demanded, looking at her tenderly and half reproachfully: then, conducting her to a seat, and placing himself near her, he added, "I have had a long interview with your mother, Perdita; and from all that I could gather, she has no opposition to offer to our love."

"I know it," responded the girl, casting down her eyes with a modesty so admirably assumed that it would have deceived the most experienced individual. "And are you well satisfied that she has thus proved favourable to our hopes?"

"Will you always seem to doubt my affection?" demanded the young man, in an impassioned tone: "will you ever appear to believe that I am so volatile—so fickle—so inconstant, as to regret to-day a step that I took yesterday?"

"Pardon me, Charles—pardon me," said Perdita, looking up into his face with an expression of the most charming *navet*: "but my mother heard a rumour—and yet it might be unfounded——"

"Speak—speak, Perdita!" cried the young man, impatiently.

"A rumour to the effect that you were looked upon as the future husband of Lady Frances Ellingham," added Perdita, in a tremulous tone, as if scarcely daring to give utterance to the jealous suspicion that the words implied.

Charles Hatfield became suddenly red as scarlet; and Perdita burst into tears.

"Oh! then the rumour is true—and you are deceiving me, my lord!" she exclaimed, affecting a passionate outburst of grief: but, in a few moments, she seemed to exercise an abrupt and powerful controul over her feelings, and rising from her seat, drew herself up into a demeanour of desperate calmness, saying, "Viscount Marston, I will show you that my affection is of no selfish nature. If you love this young lady, who must be your cousin, from all I have heard and know through my mother,—if you prefer the beautiful Frances—for beautiful I am aware she is,—Oh! then I release you from your vows to me—I restore your pught—and I, the obscure and neglected Perdita, will pray in secret for your welfare,—yes, and for the welfare of her who will have robbed me of your affections!"

"No, *Perdita—no!*" cried Charles, profoundly touched by this well-enacted piece of apparently generous self-denial: "I do *not* love my cousin Frances—and it was only this very morning that I disputed with my parents because I refused to form an

alliance on which their hearts are set. Perdita—my beloved Perdita, I thank thee—Oh! heaven alone knows how sincerely I thank thee for this manifestation of generosity,—a generosity that, if possible, has rivetted my affections more indissolubly on thee!"

"And you will pardon me, Charles—if in a moment of jealousy——" murmured the designing young woman, hanging down her head in a charming kind of confusion and bashfulness.

"Pardon thee!" repeated her dupe, catching her in his arms, and straining her passionately to his breast: "what have I to pardon? Must I pardon thee for loving me so well, my Perdita?—for only those who love well, can know what jealousy is! And, did I think that I had cause, should I not be jealous of thee, sweet Perdita? Oh! yes—and my jealousy would be very fierce and terrible in its consequences. But on neither side shall there be cause for jealousy——"

"At least not on mine, Charles," returned the young woman, gently extricating herself from his arms, and resuming her seat upon the sofa. "And now, my lord," she added playfully, "when do you intend to take some charming suburban villa—fit it up in a chaste, elegant, and beautiful style—and bear thither your bride,—for your bride am I prepared to become on the conditions which have already been established between us?"

"Without a day's—without an hour's unnecessary delay, my beloved Perdita," answered Charles, his cheeks flushing and his eyes sparkling with the hopes and voluptuous thoughts inspired by the question thus put to him; and throwing his arms around her, he drew the bewitching syren towards him.

"Charles—Charles," she murmured, as he glued his lips to her warm, glowing cheek; "you are adorably handsome—and I love you as woman never loved before. But I implore you to release me now—for—my mother might return to the room—and—and—Oh! Charles—you clasp me too violently——"

And she succeeded in disengaging herself from his arms, having maddened him as it were by the contact of her fine, voluptuous form, and the caresses she had allowed him to lavish upon her.

"Perdita, you are more reserved with me than you were yesterday," said Charles, half reproachfully.

"Or rather say that yesterday I was so hurried away by the rapturous thoughts—the delightful emotions—the elysian feelings which were excited within me by the certainty of possessing your love," murmured the young woman, "that I had no controul over myself."

"And now that you are assured of my love, you have grown comparatively cold and reserved," said Charles, with the least degree of humour.

"Should you think the better of me if I were without the least particle of maiden reserve?" she asked, in a reproachful tone. "Listen, my beloved Charles—and look not angrily on your Perdita!"

"No—not for worlds!" he exclaimed, pressing her hand to his lips, and feeling in the renewed infatuation of his soul that he was prompt to do her bidding and yield to her will in all things.

"Now you are kind and good—and I love you, dear Charles," said Perdita, in a tone of captivating artlessness. "Although we shall have no bridal ceremony as performed at a church," she resumed, "yet must our wedding-day—if I may so call it—be duly fixed and celebrated. When, therefore, you have provided for me and my mother such a home as you would wish me and my parent to possess—then shall

you bear me thither, my dearest Charles, as your bride—and—and—I will be unto thee as a wife in all respects," she added, bending her beauteous head down upon his bosom, and concealing her blushing countenance there.

"Be it as you say, my sweet Perdita!" he exclaimed. "And in all things will I do your bidding—for I love and adore you. You are an angel of beauty;—your manners are irresistibly winning;—your voice has the charm of the sweetest melody;—and your looks would kindle love in the breast of an anchorite."

"Ah! flatterer," she cried, raising her head, and tapping him gently upon the face. "Will you always think thus well of me?"

"Yes—always, always!" he exclaimed—so completely infatuated was he with the syren. "And now tell me, my charmer—in which part of London should you wish me to fix upon a beautiful villa for your reception?"

"The more secluded the spot—the better," said Perdita. "I do not wish to form the acquaintance of prying and curious neighbours, nor shall I court the presence of visitors. When you are with me, I shall have no thought but for you: when you are absent, to think of you will be sufficient occupation. I have heard that in the neighbourhood of Holloway there are some delightful villas, newly built——"

"Holloway! It is there—in that neighbourhood—that Markham Place, the mansion where the Prince of Montoni is staying, is situated."

"And you are acquainted with that Prince?" said Perdita. "Yes—for in this morning's newspaper I read, amongst the Fashionable Intelligence, that his Royal Highness had yesterday partaken of a banquet at the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham in Pall Mall."

"Oh! he is a great and illustrious Prince, Perdita!" cried Charles, his cheeks suddenly glowing with animation.

"But he is not so handsome as you, Charles?" said Perdita, half enquiringly—half playfully.

"He is very handsome, dearest," was the reply: "but his heroic deeds—his noble disposition—his boundless philanthropy—and his staunch support of the Rights of Man, constitute attractions which, were he ugly as Satan, would render him adorable as an angel."

"And have you none of those qualities, my Charles?" demanded Perdita. "Are you not gloriously handsome?—have you not a proud title, which you can claim when you will—aye, and which you will claim shortly?—and will you not some day be a Peer of the Realm, and able to electrify the senate with your eloquence? For that you would be eloquent, Charles, I am convinced;—and, oh! what pleasure—what unfeigned, heart-felt pleasure would it give your devoted Perdita to occupy even the humblest, most secluded nook in the place where you were delivering yourself of the burning thoughts and splendid ideas——"

"Oh! Perdita—do you too hope that I shall yet create for myself a great and a glorious reputation?" demanded the young man, surveying his beauteous companion with joy and surprise.

"Yes, Charles: for do I not love thee?" she asked, in her dulcet, silvery tone.

"Now—oh! now can I understand how the image of the Princess Isabella might cheer and hearten on the once obscure Richard Markham to the accomplishment of those great deeds which have placed him on so proud an eminence! Now," continued the enthu-

siastic, infatuated Charles,—“now can I comprehend how gallant knights, in the days of chivalry, would dare every peril—encounter every danger, at the behest or command of their ladye-loves! And you, my Perdita,—you shall be as a Princess Isabella in my eyes—you shall be my ladye-love;—and animated by thy smiles, will I yet carve out for myself a glorious career in the world.”

"I long to see thee in possession of thy titles, Charles—to behold thee, too, occupying thy place in the House of Peers," said Perdita. "But, hark—the clock strikes two; and now I am compelled to accompany my mother into the City——"

"To her attorney's?" asked Charles, a sudden fear seizing upon him.

"Yes—to her solicitor's office," responded Perdita: then, after suffering him to manifest a sentiment of pique and annoyance for a few moments, she threw her arms around his neck, exclaiming, "And so you are very jealous, sir—are you?—and you thought perhaps that I was about to call upon this lawyer to signify to him my readiness to accept the hand of the old nobleman who is my mother's relentless opponent in the suit? But I can assure you that the object of my visit in that quarter is one which you will no doubt highly approve. It is to inform the legal gentleman, with my own lips, that I utterly and totally decline the honour of the proposed union——"

"Charming—dearest Perdita!" ejaculated Charles, straining her in rapture to his breast.

"Inasmuch," she added, with playful artlessness—or rather with an affectation of that delightful *naïveté*,—"inasmuch as the solicitor will not believe that I can possibly resist so splendid an offer; and he is determined to hear the truth from me—and from me only."

"And were he to over-persuade you, Perdita—to impress you with the necessity of yielding in this instance——" began Charles, still labouring under the vague apprehension with which the artful creature sought to inspire him in order to attach him the more completely to her.

"Have you so much to fear on the part of an old nobleman whom I have never seen, as I have on the part of that beautiful Lady Frances who dwells beneath the same roof with you?" enquired Perdita, in the most melting tones of her flute-like voice.

"Pardon me—pardon me, dearest girl!" cried Charles, embracing her fondly.

"I have no more to pardon in you at present, than you had to forgive in me ere now," murmured the guileful woman, placing her warm cheek against his own and allowing their hair to mingle.

For a few moments she remained with him in this position,—a position that enchanted, thrilled, and intoxicated him: then suddenly withdrawing herself from his arms, she said, archly, but impressively, "It now remains with you, Charles, when our wedding-day is to be celebrated."

"Ah! if you were only as impatient as I!" he exclaimed.

They parted—the young man hastening, as was his wont after these visits, to the park to feast his imagination with a delicious reverie the whole and sole subject of which should be Perdita!

A few minutes after he had taken his departure, Mrs. Fitzhardinge sought her daughter in the drawing-room; and the ensuing dialogue took place.

"Every thing tends to forward our designs with respect to this young man," observed the old woman,

seating herself in a chair opposite to her daughter, who was reclining upon the sofa.

"And yet I cannot *now* altogether comprehend your policy, mother," returned Perdita.

"In which particular point, my child?" demanded the vile parent.

"Respecting the nature of the connexion which is to subsist between myself and Charles," said Perdita. "It was all very well for me to calculate upon being his mistress before we were aware that he is in reality a Viscount, and must be an Earl: but since you succeeded so nicely in extracting those revelations from him this morning, why should we not secure so glorious a prize by a means more durable and powerful than mere sophistry and the love which he bears me? Consider, mother, how instantaneously he took a fancy to me; and believe me when I assure you that coolness will follow as rapidly, after full satiety, on his part."

"Silly girl! thou art thyself in love with him!" cried Mrs. Fitzhardinge, in a tone of vexation.

"Yes—more than half: I acknowledge it," returned Perdita, coolly.

"And yet—but a few days ago you assured me that you could not chain yourself to one individual with any hope of being faithful to him,—that love was a passion which would never obtain over you that influence which it so often exercised over the weak, the simple-minded, and the insatuated."

"It is perfectly true, mother, that I said all which your memory has so faithfully treasured up, and your lips so accurately repeated," said Perdita, still speaking without excitement. "But *then*, my dear mother," she added, almost satirically—no, almost jeeringly, as if diverting herself with her parent's evident vexation,—"*then*, you know, I had not seen Charles Hatfield."

"And I told you not to be too confident on that point to which we are alluding," cried Mrs. Fitzhardinge. "My dear Perdita, renounce all ideas of marriage with this young man: indeed, you have compromised yourself too deeply in your denunciations of the marriage-tie to be able to recall your sentiments on that head."

"Not at all," said Perdita, authoritatively. "In the same way that I induced Charles to accede to my proposals, and even fall into my views—so can I, in a very short space, and by means of other sophistry, convince him that I had merely been playing a part to test the value of his affection—"

"No—no, Perdita: you must not attempt such a perilous proceeding," said Mrs. Fitzhardinge, evidently listening with great uneasiness to the words that fell from her daughter's lips.

"I dare and will attempt all I choose or fancy with that young man!" cried the head-strong Perdita, in an imperious tone.

"Will you not follow my counsel?" demanded Mrs. Fitzhardinge. "Have I not fulfilled all my promises to you?—did I not declare that in London you should find luxury, plenty, and ease?—did I not pledge myself that the young man should sue at your feet and implore your love?—and could you have brought about all these results for yourself?"

"I do not pretend that I could, mother," returned Perdita. "But am I to be your tool—your instrument—an automaton in your hands?—am I not to have an opinion in our councils?—or am I to pay blind obedience to you, even though I have reasons for questioning the prudence of your proceedings?"

"And do you now question the prudence of my pro-

ceedings?" demanded Mrs. Fitzhardinge, growing every moment more and more irritable.

"Yes—I do!" answered Perdita, firmly and resolutely—at the same time fixing her brilliant eyes rebelliously upon her mother. "I admit that if we had only ensnared in our toils a simple commoner—a plain Charles Hatfield—with limited resources within his reach, it would have been advisable to form no lasting connexion with him. But now—*now* that we are assured, beyond all possibility of doubt, that he is himself a nobleman and the heir to enormous wealth, it would be madness—it would be folly not to bind him to us by irrefragable chains. Why—here is a position to be obtained and ensured at once,—a position which will render us rich for the remainder of our days! And think you, mother, that I have not a little feeling of ambition in my soul? Would it not be a proud thing for you to be enabled to call the Vicountess Marston—and in due time the Countess of Ellingham—your daughter? All these considerations never flashed to my mind until immediately after Charles had quitted the room ere now: or I should have assuredly commenced the undoing of all that stupid work which, by your persuasion and so well tutored by you, I achieved in respect to the conditions whereon our connexion was to be based. What!" she cried, her eyes absolutely flashing fire: "have a coronet within my reach—and refuse it!—have a wealthy noble—or one who will be enormously wealthy—sighing at my feet, and not wed him! Mother," she cried, actually exciting herself into a passion, "you must think me to be a fool—an idiot—a mad woman!"

"I shall think you to be a fool—an idiot—and a mad woman if you persist in thwarting my plans or proceeding contrary to my advice," said Mrs. Fitzhardinge, her tanned, weather-beaten countenance becoming absolutely livid with rage.

"Ah! you have some sinister purpose to serve, mother!" cried Perdita, a sudden idea striking her "else never would you oppose yourself so completely to the dictates of common sense. What were your words to me when I spoke to you—and spoke so rashly—about the inaccessibility of my soul to the passion of love? You advised me not to count only on the chance of making a good match: you declared it to be far more probable that I might ensnare some young gentleman of birth, family, and fortune—or some old voluptuary of immense wealth;—and you added that there was more to be gained as the mistress of one of those, than as a wife. In fine, your advice was that I should remain unmarried and independent, so that the moment I had ruined one lover, I might take another."

"Yes—and that counsel was the wisest I could proffer you," said her mother, actually speaking in a savage tone, and looking as if she could have leapt, tigress-like, upon her daughter and torn her with her nails as if they were claws.

"Oh! the advice was good enough under certain circumstances," exclaimed Perdita. "It was good in so far as it related to the probability of my securing a succession of lovers, each with only a comparatively small fortune, and each individual, therefore, to be soon set aside. But now, that, at the very outset, chance has thrown in my way a young noble, who must sooner or later inherit a vast fortune which no extravagance can completely dissipate,—a fortune, indeed, which will minister to all extravagances, and yet remain unimpaired,—should I not be the veriest fool that ever tossed gold into a river or hurled



diamonds into an abyss, were I not to secure the brilliant advantages thus placed within my reach?"

"Daughter," exclaimed the old woman, with difficulty preventing a complete outburst of her fury, "I tell you that this may not be! Secure Charles Hatfield—or rather Viscount Marston—as your paramour: I will undertake to raise as much money, as you can persuade him to lavish upon you;—and then—*then*, my child," she added, adopting a tone of fawning conciliation, "you can choose a new lover and make inroads into another's fortune."

"I am determined to pursue and follow out the plan which my own convictions indicate as the most rational—the most sensible—the most advisable!" exclaimed Perdita; "and, therefore, the present dispute is useless and absurd."

"Dispute!" repeated Mrs. Fitzhardinge, her countenance again becoming absolutely livid, and her whole form trembling with rage: "I do not choose to dispute with you, insolent girl that you are! Now listen to me, Perdita—and know once for all that I *will* be obeyed in this, as in all things—or I will abandon you to your own resources—I will hurl you back into rags, want, and poverty——"

"Not while I possess this beauty of which a queen

might be proud!" said Perdita, in a quiet manner, as she glanced with self complacency at her own handsome countenance as it was reflected in a mirror opposite.

"Oh! think not that beauty is the only element of fortune!" cried the old woman, surveying her daughter with almost an expression of fiend-like hate: "for, if you dare to thwart me, Perdita, I will become your bitterest and most malignant enemy, though you are my own child:—I will pursue thee with my vengeance;—wherever you may be, I will spoil all your machinations and ruin all your schemes;—nay, more—I will compel your very lovers to thrust you ignominiously forth from them! For I will boldly proclaim how that Perdita who has enthrallled them, was accursed from her very birth—born in Newgate—thence taken by her mother to a penal colony, where she became lost and abandoned at the early age of thirteen—and how every handsome young officer in garrison at Sydney could boast of the favours of this profligate young creature!"

A mocking laugh came from the lips of Perdita,—a laugh that rang more horribly in the ears of her mother than an explosion of maledictions, recriminations, and insults would have done,—a laugh that

seemed to say, "Wretched—drivelling old woman, I despise thee!"

"You will repent this conduct, vile girl—you will repent it!" muttered Mrs. Fitzhardinge, approaching Perdita, and gazing on her with eyes that seemed to glare savagely. "Whatever be the risk—even though I involve myself in the downfall of our splendid prospects—I will ruin thee, if thou darest to oppose and thwart me! Abandon thy scheme of marrying the young nobleman—and we will be friends again: persist in it—and we separate, as mortal enemies. Yes—and the first step which I shall take will be to repair to Charles Hatfield—implore his forgiveness for having been a party to the scheme plotted against him and his—and give such a character of thee, Perdita, that his blood shall run cold in his veins at the mere thought of ever having been placed in contact with thee! And, oh! the picture which a mother will draw of her daughter in such a case,—that picture will be terrible—very terrible! Pause, then—reflect—"

"One word, mother," said Perdita, who had maintained an extraordinary degree of composure throughout this scene—doubtless because she knew that she must triumph in the long run. "You threaten bravely: let us look calmly and deliberately at what must be the inevitable results of a fearful quarrel between you and me;—let us see who would get the better of it! On one side would be you—old—ugly—disgustingly ugly, I may say—so that to become any thing save a beggar, grovelling in the kennel, would be impossible. On the other side would be myself—at all events handsome enough to gain the favour of some soft fool: and, spoil my character as you will, you cannot prevent me from finding a paramour amongst those who care nothing for the reputation, but every thing for the beauty, of their mistresses. Bread to me is certain: rags and starvation to you are equally well assured. My life of pleasure, gaiety, and dissipation is to come: your's has passed—and naught remains for you save to die in a workhouse or on a dunghill! Pardon me, my dear mother, for speaking thus openly—thus plainly," added the young woman, now throwing a spice of irony into her tone: "but you did not spare me when you summed up my characteristics just now. And before I quit the subject, I may as well observe that you yourself are not the most immaculate woman upon the face of the earth. Heaven only knows how prolific were the debaucheries of your youth: but you veiled them all beneath the aspect of a *saint*! Oh! that was excellent, dear mother—excellent, indeed!" cried Perdita, her merry, musical laugh echoing through the apartment: "only conceive you once to have been a *saint*! In good truth, you have not much of the appearance of a saint now, mother: neither had you when living with the free-settler as his mistress!"

"Perdita—Perdita!" gasped the wretched Mrs. Fitzhardinge, writhing like a snake at these bitter words, and shaking convulsively from head to foot: "you—you will drive me mad!"

"Ah! what—do you possess *feelings*, then, my dear mother?" demanded the young woman, assuming an air of profound astonishment. "And yet you must have imagined that your daughter was totally without those same little feelings which it is so easy to wound, and so difficult to heal. Well—I will forbear; otherwise, I was about to have reminded you of those glorious times—before I was born, indeed—when you were the paramour of Sir Henry Courtenay, whose

name you so pleasantly and quietly forged to a slip of paper one day—"

"Silence—Perdita—silence!" said Mrs. Fitzhardinge, in a hoarse and hollow tone—clasping her hands convulsively at the same time. "I was wrong to provoke you thus: you are very hard upon me—you have the best of it, Perdita—and I—I—"

Here the old wretch burst into tears,—not an assumed grief—no crocodile weeping,—but a flood of genuine tears, wrung from her by the cutting, biting, bitter sarcasms which her daughter had so mercilessly—so slaughterously levelled against her.

Perdita suffered her to weep without offering the least consolation: for the young woman was hurt and wounded on her side as well as the old harridan was hurt and wounded on the other.

The recriminations of those two females—that mother and daughter—had been terrible in their implacability, and appalling in their unnatural malignity.

There was a long pause—during which Mrs. Fitzhardinge sate sobbing—being absolutely hideous in her grief,—while Perdita—with flashing eyes, dilating nostrils, flushing cheeks, and palpitating bosom, lay half reclined upon the sofa—tapping the carpet petulantly with the tip of her long, narrow, exquisitely shaped shoe.

"My dear child," at length said the old woman, "are we to be friends or enemies?"

"That depends entirely upon yourself, mother," was the answer: "I am not to be tyrannised over by you—nor menaced in the fearful way in which you have threatened me to-day, without showing resentment in return. Really, one would have supposed that you were addressing yourself to the bitterest enemy you had in the world—rather than to your daughter who has done all she could to place you in a comfortable position for the remainder of your days."

"Well—well—let us be friends, Perdita!" exclaimed Mrs. Fitzhardinge.

"Yes—we will be friends," responded the daughter. "But remember that my views in respect to Charles Hatfield—or rather, Viscount Marston—are to be carried into effect."

"Without again quarrelling," interrupted her mother, "let me assure you that I cannot—cannot possibly consent to this deviation from our original arrangements. It was an express understanding between us that *marriage* was, in every case, to be out of the question—"

"And may not circumstances transpire to change original plans?" demanded Perdita, beginning to divine the reasons of her mother's uncompromising opposition to her matrimonial scheme.

"A truce to these arguments!" cried Mrs. Fitzhardinge, again growing irritable. "Remember that this evening your love-sick swain will deposit in my hands all the papers containing the evidence of his father's right to the earldom and estates of Ellingham—"

"And you will use your power to coerce me?" said Perdita, in her quiet way, which nevertheless seemed to breathe defiance.

"I do not affirm *that*, my child," cried the old woman, smothering her rage. "But I would ask you of what use those papers would be without my assistance to raise money on them?"

"Of no more utility than our acquaintance with Charles would be to you, were it not for me," returned Perdita. "And now, mother, I may as well inform you at once that I can penetrate into all the motives

which prompt you thus to oppose my marriage views with respect to Charles. You imagine that if I become his mistress only, I shall be so completely in your power that I must still continue your slave,—that a word from you relative to my past life would send away Charles Hatfield in disgust,—and that in order to prevent you from speaking that word, I shall obey you blindly. In fine, you hope to exercise a despotism alike over him and me,—dispose of the purse—and controul the household with sovereign sway. On the other hand, you imagine,—nay, do not look so black, my dear mother—we are only telling each other a few agreeable truths——”

“Go on, vile girl!” gasped Mrs. Fitzhardinge, trembling—suffocating with rage.

“On the other hand, then,” pursued the young woman, in a placid, unexcited manner,—“on the other hand you suppose that if once I become the wife of Charles Hatfield—if once he shall have taken me for better or worse—if once the indissoluble knot be tied, your power over me would cease. For were you to avenge any slight by making revelations respecting me, I might lose my husband’s esteem and love, but should not the less remain his wife. You therefore dread lest you should become a cypher—dependant upon us for your daily bread—unable to controul the purse and the domestic economy——”

“And what will you do to guarantee that all you are now saying is not a predictive sketch of what you know must happen in case I permit your marriage?” demanded Mrs. Fitzhardinge, dismayed by this accurate reading of her heart’s secrets on the part of her daughter.

“I can only assure you this much, mother,” was the answer,—“that if you conduct yourself well towards me, I shall act well towards you,—that you shall have your own way in every thing where my will is not violently thwarted,—and that I will co-operate with you cheerfully for our mutual interests, so long as you do not attempt to drive me as a slave.”

“And all this you faithfully promise, Perdita?” demanded her mother, eagerly; for she was now glad to effect any compromise rather than come to an open rupture with her daughter, who, she saw, had in reality so much the better of her.

“Be assured, mother,” replied Perdita, “that I am not for war;—and if we quarrel any more, it will be your fault.”

“We will not quarrel, Perdita,” said Mrs. Fitzhardinge: “you shall marry Charles Hatfield—or Viscount Marston, as we ought to call him;—and here let our dispute finish.”

“With all my heart. And now tell me, mother, how—where—and with whom you intend to raise the money upon these papers which Charles is to send or bring in the evening?”

“A few evenings ago, when I was lurking about Pall Mall waiting for that young gentleman, I suddenly encountered a person whom I had known years and years since, and who played me a vile—a very vile trick. He was much altered,” continued Mrs. Fitzhardinge; “but I knew him—knew him the moment the light of the lamp flashed upon his features. I accosted him—told him who I was—and upbraided him for his villainy of former times. He spoke softly and in a conciliatory manner—and we fell into a more amicable train of conversation than at first. We soon understood each other; and giving me his address—for, by-the bye, he has taken a new name—he invited me to call upon him—and we parted. Since then I

have made enquiries in the neighbourhood where he dwells; and I learn that he is reputed to be immensely rich—a miser and money-lender. He is therefore the man whom I require;—and we may reckon confidently upon his aid in the business of raising funds on the documents. This very evening I will call upon him——”

“You will permit me to accompany you, mother,” said Perdita, rather in a tone of command than of interrogatory.

“Yes—if such be your pleasure,” was the reply: for the old woman saw that it was useless and totally adverse to her own interests to thwart her daughter in any single respect.

CHAPTER CXXXVII.

TWO MORE OLD ACQUAINTANCES.

It was about eight o’clock in the evening of the same day when these scenes took place, that an old man coming from a northern direction, entered the metropolis by the suburb of Pentonville.

He was upwards of seventy-four years of age,—tall—thin—and retaining so much muscular vigour as only to stoop slightly in his gait. His complexion was perfectly cadaverous in hue, ghastly and careworn, and sinister in its expression. His attire was shabby, thread-bare, and travel-soiled,—his dusty boots denoting that he had journeyed some distance on foot. Nevertheless, there was about him a certain air which, in spite of his repulsive features and his sordid garb, denoted gentility; and an observer would have pronounced him to be, as indeed he was, a decayed gentleman.

Having passed by the Model Prison, he struck out of the highway into the fields where so many houses are now rapidly springing up, and which lie in the immediate vicinity of the Barnsbury and Liverpool Roads.

It was evident, however, that he had no definite object in view—no home whither he was proceeding; and he had turned into the fields merely to rub off the dust from his boots in the long grass, and rest himself for a few minutes in a secluded place.

At length he rose; and his wandering footsteps led him into the vicinity of the detached rows of small houses and cottages which dot the immediate neighbourhood of the Caledonian Road.

Once he stopped beneath a lamp; and taking his money from his pocket, counted it slowly. And heaven knows that the amount of his pecuniary property did not require long to reckon; for two shillings in silver and a few halfpence constituted all the store.

“This will at least purchase me a meal and procure me a bed for to-night,” he murmured to himself; “and then—to-morrow—I must present myself to those who have not heard of me for so long a time!”

With these words, the old man resumed his slow and painful walk—for he was wearied and exhausted by the length of his day’s journey. It was evident that he had been absent many—many years from the capital; for, though he had once known this neighbourhood well, yet now it was so changed that he gazed around him with astonishment,—aye, and paused to gaze around, too,—streets, rows of houses, and gardens having taken the place of the open fields.

He had now reached a spot where the dwellings

were more thinly scattered, and where the path was as yet unpaved and the road was thickly strown with flints.

It was now close upon nine o'clock; but the July evening was so beautiful that it was far from dark—only dimly obscure;—and thus, though there was no lamp in the neighbourhood where the old man was pursuing his way, yet was it sufficiently light for him to obtain a good view of objects, and even of the countenances of the few people whom he met.

Not that he paid any particular attention to the latter:—still, a stranger just arriving in London, or a person who returns to the capital after a very long absence, observes and marks every thing and every body with an earnest scrutiny at first.

The old man was passing by two small houses, forming one isolated building, and standing back from the road, when he encountered an individual whose face immediately struck him as being one which he had formerly known full well; and in the next instant a light flashed in upon his mind.

"Yes—'tis he!" he ejaculated to himself; and, laying his hand upon the other's shoulder, he said, "Mr. Howard, we meet at last—after a separation of upwards of nineteen years!"

"My name is not Howard—and I know nothing of you, sir. Let me go!" was the impatient reply, delivered by the individual whom the old man had accosted, and who was himself well stricken in years—being now midway between sixty and seventy.

"Were I on my death bed, I could swear that your name was *once* Howard, and that you were an attorney in London—an attorney who absconded, ruining thousands," exclaimed the old man.

"What means this insolence?" asked the other, affecting a tone of deep indignation mingled with surprise. "Pass on your way, sir—and let me pursue mine!"

"Not till I have had recompense or vengeance," growled the old man, ferociously. "For a sum of money did I sell myself to a vile and abandoned woman—a certain Mrs. Slingsby, whom you knew well;—and this money was deposited with you, villain that you are! For you fled—and the loss of that money was not the lightest of the myriad misfortunes that fell upon me at the time. Now do you know who I am, Mr. Howard?—for I know *you* full well!"

"You have spoken of a number of unintelligible things to me, sir—mentioned names with which I never was acquainted—alluded to circumstances entirely unknown—"

"Liar!" ejaculated Mr. Torrens—for he was the old man who had just now so wearily entered the suburb of Pentonville: "liar!" he repeated, seizing the other individual by the collar; "what should prevent me from raising an alarm and giving you into custody? For though years have elapsed, yet your offences have never been expiated—"

"Softly—softly, my good sir," interrupted the person thus addressed, and whose manner began to evince trepidation and alarm. "Let us adjourn somewhere and talk amicably on this matter—"

"No!" cried Mr. Torrens. "How do I know but that you intend to inveigle me into a den where you may perhaps silence my tongue for ever?"

"Fool—dotard!" muttered the other between his lips: "does he take me for a murderer?"

"I believe you to be capable of any villainy," returned the now infuriate Torrens, whose ears had

caught the sense of those low mutterings. "But I shall not lose sight of you until I have received full and complete satisfaction for the wrongs I endured at your hands many years ago. And that you *are* able to give such satisfaction, your appearance proves full well," he added, as his eye caught a glimpse of the gold chain and massive seals which depended from the other's fob.

"Mr. Torrens—I will no longer attempt to conceal a fact of which you are so well assured. I *am* the Howard to whom you allude: but, in the name of God! do not ruin me—do not expose me. Here—this is my dwelling," he continued, pointing to one of the two houses in front of which this colloquy took place: "walk in with me—and—and we will converse at our ease—"

"Yes—I will accompany you," said Mr. Torrens, in a laconic manner: "lead the way, sir."

Mr. Howard drew forth a small key from his pocket, and with it opened the iron gate of the railings in front of the house. Torrens followed him across the little enclosure; and with another and larger key he opened the door of the dark and gloomy-looking dwelling. No domestic appeared; and the lawyer, entering the parlour, groped about in the dark until he found some lucifer-matches—Torrens remaining all the while in the passage. At length a light was obtained; and the visitor was requested to enter the room, which, by means of the one poor candle that now threw a feeble gleam around, appeared to be but indifferently furnished,—so that the aspect of the small and cheerless house somewhat damped the hopes which Torrens had entertained of compelling the individual whom he had thus accidentally encountered, to disgorge the sum embezzled by him upwards of nineteen years previously.

"Do you live all alone here?" he demanded, taking the seat to which Howard pointed.

"Yes—all alone," was the reply. "I am too poor to keep a servant."

"Too poor!" exclaimed Mr. Torrens, his heart sinking within him.

"Yes, indeed! How should I be possessed of any money?" said Howard, glancing around with nervous anxiety, as if he were afraid of being overheard. "From the moment that I was forced, by unexpected reverses and sudden misfortunes, to fly from London, I have led a life of continued struggles; and although, a few years ago, I was venturous enough to return to the metropolis and settle in this little cottage, which I got at a cheap rent as it was only just built,—yet my affairs have not improved—"

"But you must have some means of subsistence?—you pursue some avocation?—you doubtless continue to practise—"

"No—no," interrupted Howard, hastily. "I have been compelled to change my name—and it is as Mr. Percival—*poor* Mr. Percival—that I am known in this neighbourhood."

"You adopt strange precautions for a poor man," said Torrens, pointing to the strong iron bars that fastened the shutters of the window: then, turning a look full of sardonic meaning upon Howard—or Percival, as we shall call him,—he added, "And methinks that when you opened your front door just now, a heavy chain rattled. Assuredly your little house is well protected."

"What would you infer from these facts?" demanded Percival: "that I have money—that I have turned miser?" he cried, with a forced and unnatural laugh. "Absurd! The person who lived here before

me, and those bars put up to the window-shutters, and that heavy chain to the street-door—"

"I thought you got the house cheap because it had only just been built?" said Torrens, smiling with malignant incredulity.

"Yes—but I did not tell you that I was the first person who occupied it," exclaimed Percival, as if eager to explain away an inconsistency in his statements and efface from the mind of his visitor the disagreeable impression made there.

"This is mere child's play, Mr. Howard—or Percival—or whatever your name may be!" cried Torrens. "You have got money—and you wish me to believe you poor. For myself, I am poor—so poor that I have but wherewith to obtain a meal and a bed for one night. It is true that I have a daughter and a son-in-law in London;—and it is likewise true that necessity—stern, imperious necessity has driven me at last to this city to seek assistance at their hands. But for nine years have I remained as one dead to them: for nine years have I wandered about the world, caring not what might become of me, and wishing to be believed dead in all reality by my daughter who suspects that I have been very criminal, and by my son-in-law who knows that I have! Yes—yes: I have purposely left them in uncertainty relative to me—unhappy man that I am,—purposely left them so, I say, in order that they may apprehend the worst! Stern want, however, was driving me to them when I encountered you: to-morrow morning I should have appeared in their presence,—in the presence of the daughter whom I do not love, and of her husband whom I hate—*hate*, for his very virtues, and because he knows me to be so vile!" added the old man, bitterly. "But now, sir, that I have met with you, your purse must save me the pain—the humiliation—the annoyance of encountering those beings face to face! Come, Mr. Percival—I have spoken to you frankly: do you be equally candid with me."

"Candid in what?" demanded the individual thus addressed.

"In respect to your own means and resources," returned Torrens. "I do not wish to be hard upon you; but a portion of the money that you robbed me of, I must and will have."

"These are harsh words—and unavailing, too," said Percival: "for I have not a sixpence to bless myself with! But," he added, with a malicious grin, "if I cannot give you money, I may perhaps impart a piece of agreeable intelligence."

"What! to me?" exclaimed Torrens, in a tone of surprise.

"Yes—to you. What would you think if I were to tell you that your dearly-beloved wife was in London at this very moment, and passing under the aristocratic name of Fitzhardinge?"

"My wife!" repeated Torrens, turning positively livid as these words struck upon his ears. "No—impossible! I would not meet that dreadful woman for thousands of pounds!"

"Then if you remain here you will assuredly encounter her," said Percival; "for I received a note from her this evening announcing her intention to honour me with a visit," he added, intently watching the effect which these words produced upon his companion.

"Villain! you are endeavouring to get rid of me as speedily as possible!" cried Torrens, almost foaming at the mouth with rage.

"Should you recognise your wife's handwriting?"

demanding Percival, a diabolical grin still distorting features which, once handsome, had been marred and rendered repulsive by time and evil passions. "Though she is now stricken in years and has become positively hideous in personal appearance, that handwriting retains all the grace and fluency which ever characterised it."

With these words, he took a perfumed note from his pocket-book, and handed it to Torrens, who, hastily glancing over its contents, read the following words:—

"Mrs. Fitzhardinge presents her compliments to Mr. Percival, and will call upon him between nine and ten this evening on very particular business. She therefore hopes that Mr. Percival will have the kindness to remain at home to receive her."

"Now are you satisfied?" demanded Percival, who perceived by the workings of Torrens' countenance that the handwriting had been fully recognised.

"And on what matters is she—that vile woman—coming to you?" asked Torrens, impatiently.

"I cannot answer the question. You perceive that she speaks only of *particular business* in a vague fashion. I met her by accident some few days ago—and have not seen her since."

"And she comes between nine and ten," mused Torrens: "and it is already close upon ten o'clock! I would not meet her for the world: 't would recall to my mind, with intolerable force, all the anguish—all the sufferings—No—no," he cried, suddenly interrupting himself and starting from his chair; "I will not—I cannot meet her!"

"Then you had better depart at once," said Percival, evidently most anxious to see the unwelcome visitor turn his back upon the house.

"Yes—I shall depart indeed," exclaimed Torrens: "but you must give me money first. Nay—no more excuses: I am a desperate man—"

At that instant a double knock at the street door echoed through the little dwelling.

"'T is your wife!" said Percival.

"Hide me—or let me escape," cried Torrens, manifesting a violent and most unfeigned reluctance to encounter the woman whom for so many reasons he loathed and abhorred.

"Here—by the back gate," said Percival; and, taking the light in his hand, he hastily conducted the almost bewildered Torrens along the passage—down a few steps—and thence to a door opening upon a piece of unenclosed waste ground at the back of the house.

At that instant the double knock was repeated—more loudly than before and evidently with impatience.

"Good night, Mr. Torrens," said Percival, scarcely able to subdue a spice of lurking satire in his tone.

"Good night," returned the other, savagely. "But I shall visit you again to-morrow morning."

Percival closed the back gate as if to shut out this intimation from his ears; and, hurrying to the front door, he gave admittance to Perdita and her mother.

CHAPTER CXXXVIII.

THE MONEY-LENDER.

MRS. AND MISS FITZHARDINGE were attired in the plainest possible manner, so that they seemed to be some poor tradesman's wife and daughter. But the moment the light of the candle fell on Perdita's coun-

tenance, Mr. Percival literally started as the glorious beauty of that face was revealed to him. The young woman perceived the effect of her charms on the old lawyer; and a smile of triumph played on her haughty lip,—for she said within herself, “Wherever I go, men pay homage to my loveliness!”

Hastily closing the front door, Percival now conducted his two visitresses into the back-parlour, which was far more commodiously furnished than the one where his interview with Torrens had taken place. The shutters of this room were, however, as strongly protected by iron bars and as well secured as those in the other; and Mr. Percival had multiplied in them the number of holes cut in the shape of a heart, in order that he might be enabled to fire his blunderbuss at a moment's warning, and in almost any direction, through the shutters, in case of an attempt on the part of burglars to effect an entry in the rear of the building.

For it was perfectly true, as he had informed Torrens, that he lived alone in the house: but he was reported to be a miser—and such indeed he was. Having been extravagant and profligate in his earlier years, he had fallen into the opposite extreme; and when he absconded from his creditors, the money which he had taken with him he hoarded carefully. For a long time he had remained concealed in a distant town, placing out his funds in small loans at an enormous interest; so that as his wealth augmented, his parsimonious habits increased. At last, become greedy and griping as any miser whose renown has been preserved in tale-book or history, Percival—as we shall continue to call him—resolved on venturing to London, where the field for his cupidity was more ample than in the provinces. Trusting to the alteration that years had made in his personal appearance, and to the disguise of the name which he had assumed, he settled in the secluded neighbourhood and comparatively lonely house where we now find him;—and, without seeking business obtrusively, he soon found plenty. One person whom he obliged with a loan would give his address to another also requiring assistance; and thus his clients or patrons—whichever the reader may choose to call the borrowers—increased. He was almost constantly at home—formed no acquaintances—and was short and pithy in his mode of transacting business. He never advanced money save where he perceived the security to be ample; and if occasionally he made a bad debt, he employed an attorney who asked no impertinent questions to sue the defaulter in his own name, it being alleged that the unpaid bill had been passed in a legitimate manner to the pettifogger aforesaid. An elderly widow, of the name of Dyer, occupied the house next door; and she acted in the capacity of charwoman for Mr. Percival—keeping his dwelling in order and preparing for him his frugal meals.

Having recorded these few necessary particulars, we shall now return to the little back parlour, where Mr. Percival and his two visitresses were seated. His back was turned to the window: but Mrs. Fitzhardinge and Perdita, who sat opposite to him, faced it,—while the candle stood on the mantel,—so that had any one peeped through the heart-holes in the shutters, the countenances of the women must have been plainly visible to such curious observer outside the casement.

“Your daughter, madam, I presume?” said Mr. Percival, with a polite inclination of the head towards the handsome Perdita.

“Yes, my dear sir,” was the reply. “And she is

about to form an excellent match with a young gentleman who is indeed a nobleman by right, and who will shortly assert his title to that distinction. He wishes to borrow money for his immediate purposes and also to assist me: hence my visit to you this evening.”

“Well—well, my dear madam,” said Percival; “if the security be good—”

“The security is ample,” returned Mrs. Fitzhardinge. “He is indubitably the heir to vast estates—and his bond—”

“Will be quite sufficient,” added Percival. “That is—presuming him to be of age—”

“He is twenty-five years old,” said Mrs. Fitzhardinge. “But the history of himself and family is most extraordinary: and his father is not altogether unknown to you:—for, if I remember aright, it was you who prosecuted the celebrated highwayman, Thomas Rainford, for the robbery of the late Sir Christopher Blunt?”

“What earthly connexion can exist between Tom Rain and the young nobleman who wants to borrow money?” demanded Percival, with unfeigned astonishment.

“Grant me your patience, my dear sir,” said Mrs. Fitzhardinge, “and I will explain the matter as concisely as possible. Thomas Rainford was in reality the son of the late Earl of Ellingham—the eldest son, and legitimately born, of that nobleman, who privately married a certain Octavia Manners. The individual who at present bears the title and enjoys the estates of the Earldom of Ellingham, is the offspring of a second marriage contracted by his father. He and Rainford are consequently half-brothers. All these facts are proven by certain papers now in the possession of myself and daughter. One of the documents is the marriage-certificate of the late Earl with Octavia Manners,—another the baptismal certificate of their son,—a third the journal of Octavia Manners explaining many matters connected with the whole affair,—and then follows a variety of documents establishing the identity of Thomas Rainford with the son of the late Earl and the Countess Octavia. Thus far the rights of Thomas Rainford are clearly made out. I must now inform you that Rainford and Lady Georgiana Hatfield have long been united in matrimonial bonds, and that the husband has for a considerable time adopted his wife's name. The offspring of this alliance is the young gentleman of whom I have already spoken to you, and who at present bears the denomination of Charles Hatfield. Now, his father being the rightful Earl of Ellingham, this Charles Hatfield is actually the Viscount Marston, and heir to the title and estates of the Earldom.”

“Your history, my dear madam, is clear and comprehensive enough,” said Percival, already calculating the enormous gains which might be derived from the fact of becoming the banker to a young nobleman having a vast fortune in the perspective, and whom he supposed to be as extravagantly inclined as youthful scions of the aristocracy in such cases generally are. “And you possess the proofs of all the singular facts which you have detailed?”

“The proofs—the positive proofs,” replied Mrs. Fitzhardinge, emphatically;—and turning towards her daughter, she said, “Show Mr. Percival the papers.”

“It is useless,” answered Perdita, in a firm but quiet manner, “unless he first agree to advance a certain sum of money, should they be satisfactory.”

“True,” said her mother, biting her lip at the thought that her daughter was more keen than herself: then, addressing herself to the miser, she observed,

"You heard the remark that fell from the lips of Miss Fitzhardinge?"

"Yes—yes," returned Mr. Percival. "We shall most likely do business together—most likely," he repeated. "At the same time, I must see my way very clearly—"

"And we must be careful not to reveal unnecessarily any more of the important secrets of which we are the depositories," said Perdita.

"Quite right, young lady!" exclaimed the miser, who experienced no slight degree of embarrassment: for he was afraid, on the one hand, of letting a good chance slip through his fingers—and he was fearful, on the other, of admitting that he had ample resources immediately available.

Not that Percival dreaded on the part of Mrs. Fitzhardinge the same attempt at extortion, or rather of obtaining restitution, which had been made by Mr. Torrens; because he knew full well that she was occupying a false position in the world, and living under an assumed name as well as himself;—and should she take it into her head to threaten him with an exposure as being no other than Howard the run-away attorney, he could in a moment retaliate by proclaiming her to be Mrs. Slingsby—or Mrs. Torrens—the woman who had been transported for forgery!

No:—Mr. Percival dreaded not menace on the part of Mrs. Fitzhardinge; but the naturally suspicious disposition of the miser, and the vague fears that ever haunt the avaricious man when questioned as to the amount and whereabouts of his resources—these were the influences which made Percival hesitate to plunge too precipitately into the transaction now submitted for his consideration.

"Well, sir,—are you prepared to negotiate with us—or not?" demanded Perdita, after a short pause, during which the miser fidgetted nervously upon his chair.

"It all depends, Miss—it all depends on the amount your noble friend requires," he answered at length.

"The entire business is left in our hands," said Mrs. Fitzhardinge; "and we wish to raise between five and six thousand pounds in the first instance—"

"Of which one thousand must be paid to-night," added Perdita, "as an earnest that the transaction is seriously entered into."

"A thousand pounds to-night!" cried the miser. "But how is that possible—even if I had the money in the house," he asked, looking anxiously around, and sinking his voice to a low whisper,—“how is it possible, I say, since the young nobleman is not here to give me any acknowledgment?"

"This objection was naturally anticipated by us," replied Perdita. "Viscount Marston, instead of sending us the papers this evening, did us the honour to call personally with them; and his lordship confided to me,—and to me alone," added Perdita, with a rapid glance of triumphant meaning at her mother,—“his note of hand for one thousand guineas."

"I must congratulate you, my dear madam," exclaimed Percival, addressing himself with a smile to the old woman,—“I must congratulate you on possessing a daughter of the most business-like character in the person of Miss Fitzhardinge."

"Then pray let us transact our present affairs in a business-like manner," said Perdita, who was rapidly putting herself more forward in the matter, and proportionately throwing her mother into the back-ground: so that the old woman more than once bit her lip to restrain her rising choler;—but, remembering the

terrific scene of the morning, she saw no alternative save to allow her daughter to have her own way—trusting, however, to the chapter of accidents to restore to her in the long run that paramount influence which she had lost.

"You wish me to discount at once that note of hand for a thousand guineas?" said the miser, fixing his eyes admiringly on Perdita's splendid countenance.

"Yes—as an earnest that you are not prompted by mere curiosity to look farther into this most extraordinary, mysterious, and yet easily understood affair," replied Perdita.

"I will accede to your terms, Miss Fitzhardinge," said Percival, after a few minutes' deliberation,—“provided that the documents in your possession bear out your mother's statements."

"Place the money on the table, sir," returned the young woman, in her quiet though somewhat imperious manner; "and these papers," she added, producing a sealed packet at the same time, "shall be submitted to your perusal."

"Good!" cried the miser.

He then rose from his seat; and, having once more cast a furtive look around him, as if it were possible for an intruder to secrete himself in a room fourteen feet by ten, and which the three inmates already nearly filled, he proceeded to open an iron safe that was fitted into a kind of cupboard in one corner. Thence he took forth a tin cash-box, which, when opened, revealed heaps of Bank-notes, and a large amount in gold.

"There, ladies," said he: "I have now convinced you of my ability to proceed farther in this transaction; and it is your turn, Miss," he added, looking at Perdita, "to take the next step."

"Granted!" was the reply; and, opening the packet, she handed the several papers, which were properly classed and numbered, one by one to the miser,—receiving back each before she gave him the next following.

Mr. Percival read the documents without much emotion. His pecuniary avocations had blunted the sentiment of curiosity in his soul: he viewed the matter only in a business-light;—and so long as the security was good, he cared not if all the highwaymen in the world should turn out to be noblemen in their own right. He thought of the profits that might arise from ministering to the extravagances, as he supposed, of a young nobleman having excellent certainties in the perspective; and it was not of the slightest importance to him how Mrs. Fitzhardinge and Perdita had contrived to inveigle him into their meshes—how they had gotten possession of the papers—or how the money raised was to be expended.

"This is completely satisfactory as far as it goes," he said, returning to the young woman the last paper which she had placed in his hand. "The documents show that Rainford is the real Earl of Ellingham; but there is no evidence to prove that your Charles Hatfield is his son."

"We are well convinced of that fact," said Mrs. Fitzhardinge.

"Yes—I suppose it may be admitted," observed Percival, who had not the least idea that Charles Hatfield had ever passed and was still passing as the nephew of those who were really his parents. "But there is still one question which must be fully cleared up;—and this is the legitimacy of the young man's birth. If he be the lawfully begotten son of the rightful owner of the title and estates of the Earldom—

then is he the heir, beyond all possibility of doubt: but if he be illegitimate——”

“The idea is absurd,” interrupted Mrs. Fitzhardinge. “There can be no hesitation in declaring that Thomas Rainford and Lady Georgiana had been privately married long before the man himself was condemned to death: else wherefore should she have exerted her interest to obtain a pardon for him at the hand of George the Fourth?”

“I remember the transaction,” said Percival; “and I have no moral doubt that all you tell me is perfectly correct. Indeed, I am so well assured of it, that I have not the least objection to discount the note of hand, on condition that the defective evidence be supplied me before I am called upon to make further advances.”

“Most certainly,” exclaimed Perdita. “Charles will give you every satisfactory proof of the validity of his claims. You require testimony to show that he is the lawfully begotten son of those who now pass under the name of Mr. and Lady Georgiana Hatfield?”

“The certificates of *their* marriage and *his* birth,” said the miser. “Where is the note of hand?”

Perdita produced it; and a little altercation then arose respecting the rate of discount. Mrs. Fitzhardinge manifested a greedy anxiety to conclude the bargain on the miser's own exorbitant terms: but Perdita argued the point with him in a resolute manner. At last, however, an amicable understanding was arrived at; and the miser was permitted to deduct seventy-five pounds for the discount. Perdita received the amount which he then told down upon the table; and the old woman's features grew distorted with rage—a rage the more intense, because she was forced to restrain it—when she found that her daughter did not offer to render her the guardian of the purse.

But Perdita had that day asserted an empire which she was resolved to maintain—a domination which she was determined to grasp indivisibly. Without positively offending or irritating her mother by pointed and overt insult, she nevertheless had made up her mind to act as the mistress in all things;—and thus had the punishment of the vile old woman already begun, even on account of the new schemes of wickedness which she had set on foot.

Having secured the precious packet of papers and the money about her person, the beautiful Perdita rose from her chair, saying, “We may now take our departure, mother.”

“One word first!” exclaimed Percival, a sudden reminiscence striking him: then, turning towards Mrs. Fitzhardinge, he said, “My dear madam, I have some news to impart which I had almost forgotten in the absorbing nature of the business that has occupied us for the last hour,—news which will not a little astonish you——”

“Then pray keep me no longer in suspense!” exclaimed Mrs. Fitzhardinge, Perdita's conduct not having put her into the best of possible humours.

“Just before you knocked at the door this night——”

“Well, well?” ejaculated the impatient woman.

“A man was with me——”

“And that man?” repeated Mrs. Fitzhardinge, gasping for breath, as if she anticipated the reply.

“Was your husband!” added the miser.

A hideous expression passed over the countenance of Mrs. Fitzhardinge,—an expression of mingled hate, apprehension, and rage; and she staggered for a moment as if she were about to fall.

But subduing her emotions, she approached the miser, and said in a low, hoarse, grating tone, “Does he know that I am in London?—is he aware that I am in England—passing by the name of Fitzhardinge——”

“No—no,” replied Percival hastily: for he saw by the old woman's manner that she would not thank him were he to inform her that he had made her husband acquainted with so many particulars concerning her.

“You are sure—you are certain?” demanded she, breathing somewhat more freely.

“Since Mr. Percival has already answered you satisfactorily, mother, wherefore require additional assurances?” said Perdita, who was in haste to depart—for it was now waxing very late.

“Because I would sooner meet one of those hideous snakes that I have seen in Australia, than encounter that man!” responded the old woman. “I know not why,—but I hate him—I loathe and abhor him——”

“Come along, mother,” interrupted Perdita, impatiently: “Mr. Percival cares nothing about all this.”

“True! but one word more,” cried Mrs. Fitzhardinge. “Tell me, sir—is that man—*my husband*,”—and the words appeared almost to choke her,—“is he well off—or poor and wretched?”

“He seemed to be very miserable,” answered the miser;—“so miserable that he wished to obtain assistance from me! But I—I never give,” he added, after a moment's hesitation.

“I believe you, sir,” remarked Perdita, a faint smile of contempt curling her haughty but beautiful lip. “Now, mother, at last you are ready, I presume?”

“Allow me to light you to the door,” said Percival; and, with a bow, he preceded the two females into the passage.

He opened the front door, and Perdita, wishing him “good night” bounded forth first into the open air—for she felt relieved at escaping from the miser's cheerless abode:—her mother followed more slowly—and just as she passed by Percival, who stood on the threshold officiously holding the candle, the light streamed fully on the countenance of the old woman. At that same instant Mrs. Dyer—the widow who lived at the next house—was returning home from a neighbour's; and she caught a complete view of the face of Mrs. Fitzhardinge. It struck the good woman at the moment that she had seldom beheld such a repulsive, sinister countenance: but she was accustomed to see strange-looking people visit the miser's abode;—and the circumstance therefore made no particular impression on her mind.

She merely said “Good night, sir,” to the miser, and forthwith entered her own abode.

Percival's door closed at the same instant; and Mrs. Fitzhardinge having overtaken her daughter, the two retraced their way to the City Road, whence they took a cab to Suffolk Street,

CHAPTER CXXXIX.

THE MISER ALONE IN HIS DWELLING.

HAVING carefully barred and bolted the street-door Percival entered the front room, and assured himself that the shutters were safely fastened.

He then returned to the back parlour; and, seating himself at the table, proceeded to examine the contents of his cash-box.



He looked at the note of hand which he had received that night, and which bore the signature of *Marston*—for, in compliance with the suggestion of Mrs. Fitzhardinge, the infatuated Charles Hatfield had signed the document with the name to which he believed himself to be entitled.

The first sensations of the miser, as he fixed his eyes on the “promise to pay” at a specific date the sum of *one thousand guineas*, were of pleasure: for he calculated the profit he had derived from the transaction—and he flattered himself that he had gained seventy guineas in a single hour.

“And with so little trouble, too,” he muttered to himself.

But, in the next moment, a gloomy shade began to cross his countenance; for the thought stole upon him that perhaps he had acted too precipitately—that the women might have forged a number of papers to delude him—that, after all, there might be no such person in existence as Charles Hatfield, or Viscount Marston.

“Pshaw!” he exclaimed emphatically, as he endeavoured to banish these unpleasant reflections from his mind; “it is all right—and I am a fool thus to yield to misgivings. Why should not Tom Rain

be the rightful Earl of Ellingham? Things more strange and improbable have occurred in this world. And if he be really the elder brother of the nobleman now bearing the title, why should he not have a son who is the heir to that title and likewise to the estates? Yes—yes: it is all feasible enough! Besides, amongst those papers were the marriage certificate of the late Earl and Octavia Manners—and the baptismal certificate of their child. Well, then—granting that there is a Charles Hatfield,—or, in other words, a Viscount Marston,—what is less extraordinary than that so beautiful a creature as this Miss Fitzhardinge should have captivated the young noble? She is a splendid girl—a very splendid girl! Even in the plain garb which she wore this evening—a sort of disguise, no doubt—she looked truly bewitching. What eyes!—what a profile!—what teeth!—what hair! Ah! I wish that I was a young man now—that I had not these sixty-five winters on my head: I would even yet endeavour to rival Viscount Marston! But, no—no: that were impossible! These young girls are smitten with titles more than with money: and, on my honour, Miss Fitzhardinge will become the rank of Viscountess full well. She has the dignity—the stateliness—and yet the grace and elegance of a woman of

fashion! All this, doubtless, must be the work of nature: for where could she have become familiar with the manners and customs of the drawing-room? Ah! was not that a noise?"

And the miser, hastily shutting up his cash-box, started to his feet.

He listened—but all was still!

"A false alarm," he murmured to himself—and resumed his seat.

But the incident had completely disturbed the current of his thoughts which were flowing into a more voluptuous channel than for years and years they had done,—the beauty of Perdita having made a deep impression upon the mind of the miser, and for a few minutes weaned away his attention from the hitherto all-absorbing gold that he worshipped so devotedly.

And now that alarm,—whether false or real, we cannot as yet determine,—recalled his errant thoughts to the one engrossing subject: and carefully depositing his cash-box in the safe, he next secured the safe itself.

Then, having placed the key in his pocket, he took the candle in his hand, and once more inspected the street-door—the shutters in the front-room—and the bolt of the back-gate.

He descended into the kitchen,—that kitchen which no domestic occupied, and the hearth of which so seldom sparkled or shone with blazing coal or wood,—a cursed hearth which, even in the very midst of summer, seemed cheerless and cold! The area that gave light to the kitchen-window was strongly barred over: the window itself was likewise barred;—and the door opening into the area was well secured with bolts and chains.

All these multiplied precautions were duly inspected by the miser. Forgotten now was the image of Perdita;—gold—gold—his gold,—this was the one absorbing idea!

No—not the only one: for with the thought of possessing gold is ever associated the dread of losing it;—and at this moment the man's mind was a prey to vague fears—undefined alarms—gloomy misgivings.

He did not like that noise which he had heard:—it haunted him like a spectre;—it was something that weighed upon his soul like lead.

He felt—he knew that he was really *alone* in that house,—aye, and that the house was lonely in situation likewise: for he could not count for aid, in case of need, on the elderly widow next door and her two or three poor female lodgers. Thus, the fact that there was a house adjoining did not detract from the sense of utter loneliness awakened in his mind respecting his own abode.

But were not the bolts secure—the chains fastened—the bars all firm and strong? Oh! he had not spared his money to obtain the best iron and the best work when those precautions were adopted: and, since he had become a miser, he had never paid a bill so cheerfully as that which the defences of his dwelling had incurred.

Yes—the bolts were secure—the chains were well fastened—and the bars were all firm and strong;—and yet Percival was not at ease in his mind.

That unknown, unaccountable noise had alarmed him. It was a noise the nature of which he could scarcely explain to himself,—nor whether it had occurred inside or outside the house: no—nor whether it were the creaking of timber—or the shaking of the shutters—or the sound of a human voice speaking low, hoarse, and in a disguised tone.

Having convinced himself that all was secure in the kitchen and the little scullery at the back, Percival once more ascended to his back parlour. He looked at his watch, and found it was half an hour past midnight:—still he felt no inclination to sleep! Vague and oppressive fears continued to haunt him;—and the more he essayed to wrestle with his reflections, the more intolerable did they become,—till at last horrible ideas were forced upon his imagination,—of how misers had been murdered for their gold—how their blood had been poured out even on the very treasure-chests to which they clung with desperate tenacity while the blows of the assassins rained down upon their heads!

Of all these things he thought; and his brain appeared to whirl. He cast his eyes around: objects of terror seemed to encounter them in all directions—for his fevered, excited imagination conjured up the most horrifying phantoms.

Suddenly taking his head as it were in his hands, and pressing it violently, he exclaimed aloud, "Perdition take this cowardly nervousness! What have I to fear to-night—more than any other? I need rest—repose—slumber;—and when I awake in the morning, I shall laugh at myself for the absurd terrors to which I have yielded now!"

Taking the light in his hand, he was about to quit the room and seek his chamber up stairs, when a sound, as of the back door slowly opening, fell upon his ears;—and so great was the alarm with which this circumstance filled him,—striking him as it were with a sudden paralysis,—that he let the candle fall upon the floor—and the light was immediately extinguished.

Then there was the rush as of a man up the stairs leading from the back door to the parlour;—and in another moment Percival was assailed in the dark, and in a desperate manner. A heavy blow, as with a bludgeon, felled him to the ground,—not quite stunning him, but so far depriving him of his physical energies that he could not even cry out. But he grasped the murderer by the throat; and a short struggle ensued. The assassin, however, was armed with the determination, if not with the strength, of a demon;—and, dashing the miser back on the floor again with all his force, he seized the bludgeon and wielded it with such fearful effect, that in a few instants the victim lay motionless and silent beneath him!

This fearful crime was accomplished in the dark: and yet the murderer appeared not to be afraid—nor to lose his presence of mind. It would also seem that he was acquainted with the nook where the miser's gold was concealed: yes—even circumstances more minute still were known to him. For, stooping down, and passing his hand over the corpse, he felt in the very pocket where Percival had placed the key of the cupboard enclosing the iron safe;—and then, groping his way to that cupboard, he opened it,—opened likewise the iron safe,—and drew forth the tin case containing the miser's gold and bank-notes. Breaking open the lid of the box, the miscreant secured all the coin, notes, and papers about his person, and then stole away from the dwelling by means of the back-gate, which he closed behind him.

At half-past seven o'clock in the morning, Mrs Dyer knocked at the door of the miser's house, and was somewhat surprised when, five minutes having elapsed, her summons remained unanswered.

"Perhaps he has over-slept himself," she muttered to herself: "I will come back again presently;"—and the woman returned to her own abode.

But something like a misgiving had stolen into her mind,—a vague and indefinable fear—a presentiment against which she could not wrestle. A gloom had fallen on her spirits: she was in that humour when people who are in any way superstitious, expect bad news. Not that she had heard any noise in the course of the night, or that she had any motive for suspicion:—the feeling that oppressed her was excited by no accountable and intelligible cause,—unless, indeed, it were that during the five or six years she had waited upon Mr. Percival, this was the very first occasion on which she had failed to find him already up and dressed, and ready to admit her at a stipulated hour.

Having performed a few domestic duties in her own house—but in a strange manner, as if she scarcely knew what she was doing,—Mrs. Dyer returned to the miser's front-door, at which she knocked again.

But again there was no response: all was silent.

The widow-woman was now seriously alarmed; and, hastening back into her dwelling, she informed her female lodgers that she could not make Mr. Percival hear next door, and was afraid something had happened. The three women, to whom these observations were addressed, accompanied her to the miser's house; and as all within was still silent as the grave, they proceeded round to the back-door with the intention of looking in through the window shutters, which, as we have before stated, were perforated with many heart-holes. But Mrs. Dyer first happened to try the back-gate, and, to her surprise, found it unfastened. She and the other women then entered the house; and their attention, now rendered keen by dark suspicions, was immediately attracted to the fact that the part of the door-post into which the bolt of the back-gate fitted, had been cut away, *from the outside*, in such a manner that it was an easy affair to slide back the bolt. The females beheld this ominous appearance with dismay;—but how shuddering were the looks of deep apprehension which they rapidly and silently exchanged, when they likewise noticed an old piece of iron still sticking in the lock,—a sure indication of that lock having been picked, also from the outside!

Had either one of the women now manifested the least hesitation to proceed, the others would have gladly followed the example to retreat. But, huddling all together—and in deep silence—they slowly ascended the stairs leading to the back parlour.

The door of this room was half open; and as the widow endeavoured to push it farther back still, it was stopped by something that evidently was not a table nor a chair,—no—nor aught made of wood.

The women slowly entered the parlour:—and then their tongues were suddenly loosened—and piercing shrieks burst from their lips. For the prismatic light which streamed through the heart-holes of the closed shutters, played on the smashed, gory, and disfigured countenance of the murdered man!

Terror for a few minutes rooted to the spot the spectatrices of this horrible spectacle:—and, clinging—hanging to each other, they remained gazing, in terror and dismay, on the remains of him whom they had all seen alive and in health on the preceding day!

At length the female who was nearest to the door seemed suddenly to recover the use of her limbs; and, with another ejaculation of horror, she fled precipitately,—her companions following her with a haste which seemed to indicate that they were afraid lest

the murdered man should stretch forth his hand and clutch the hindermost by the garments.

Oh! what terrors are inspired by the cold—inanimate—powerless remains of mortality! And yet men of the strongest minds have had their fears in this respect;—and heroes who would have faced a serried rank bristling with bayonets, or hunted the savage tiger in the jungles of Hindoostan, have feared to remain alone with the corpse of a fellow-creature!

Full soon was the dreadful rumour spread throughout the neighbourhood that the miser Percival had been murdered during the night;—and the police were speedily upon the spot.

The dead body indeed presented a hideous spectacle to the view:—the countenance was so disfigured as to defy recognition;—and the skull was fractured in several places. By the side of the corpse lay a heavy stake; and, as it was covered with blood, and some of the hair from the murdered man's head was sticking to it, there was no difficulty in pronouncing it to have been the weapon used by the assassin. The candlestick was found on the floor close by;—the cupboard and the iron safe were open;—and the tin-box, emptied of its contents, was stumbled over by one of the officers.

Not the slightest suspicion could possibly be attached to the widow-woman or her lodgers occupying the adjacent house;—but they were necessarily questioned by the inspector, with a view to elicit any particulars that might aid the officers of justice in sifting the most mysterious and horrible affair.

Mrs. Dyer stated that she had heard no disturbance during the night; and her lodgers all made a similar declaration.

"I passed the evening with a neighbour," said the widow, naming the friend at whose house she had supped; "and I returned home about half-past eleven o'clock. Mr. Percival was at that moment taking leave of some visitors at his own door: and—Oh! I remember now," exclaimed Mrs. Dyer, a sudden thought striking her,—“there were two women—one apparently young, if I might judge by the hasty glimpse I caught of her figure—for I did not see her face, as she was standing by the gate opening into the road—”

"And the other woman?" demanded the inspector.

"Was old and very ugly," returned the widow. "I saw her countenance plainly enough; for the light which Mr. Percival held, streamed full upon it;—and I thought at the moment that I had never in my life beheld such a repulsive—horrible-looking creature. I was really frightened—there was something so unpleasant in her looks."

"And was any man with them?" enquired the officer.

"No: the two women were alone. They took leave of Mr. Percival, and, I suppose, went away. At all events, I know that he closed his door just at the same moment that I shut mine. I said 'Good night' to him: and that was the last time I saw the poor gentleman alive."

"It is highly important," observed the inspector, "that we should find out these two women of whom you speak—as they were, to all appearances, the last persons who were with the deceased?"

Mrs. Dyer then gave as accurate a description as she could of the personal appearance of the old woman whose countenance had struck her as being so repulsive and sinister;—and the inspector, having left a couple of officers on the premises where the crime had

been committed, departed to acquaint the Coroner with the dreadful occurrence.

CHAPTER CXL.

FRESH SCENES AND MORE TROUBLES AT HOME.

WHILE the discovery of the assassination of the old miser was being made in Pentonville, as just related, a scene of some interest occurred simultaneously at the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham, in Pall Mall.

Charles Hatfield had risen early, after having passed a restless night; and, his toilette being completed, he was just meditating—unpleasantly meditating on the demeanour that it was proper for him to assume at the breakfast-table,—when the door opened, and his father entered the chamber.

The young man had not encountered his parents since the dispute of the preceding morning: he had purposely avoided them throughout the day—not appearing at the dinner-table, and absenting himself likewise from the usual family meeting at the supper-hour. He therefore felt himself somewhat disagreeably situated,—being totally unprepared to meet his father, and having decided on no definite course to pursue with regard to him.

"My dear son," said Mr. Hatfield, approaching and taking the young man's hand, "it is necessary that we should have an immediate explanation. I allude to the occurrences of yesterday morning; and I regret that you should have adopted the unusual course of absenting yourself throughout the day——"

"I returned home between seven and eight last evening," interrupted Charles, hastily, but not disrespectfully.

"I am aware of it," said Mr. Hatfield, fixing his eyes upon his son in a penetrating manner. "But you only remained in the house a few minutes;—and, having visited your chamber, you hurried away again. Were you afraid to encounter your parents? Remember, Charles, if you felt that your conduct of the morning had been undutiful and improper—nay, I will even say *cruel*, towards us—yet a single word expressive of contrition would have made us open our arms to receive you."

"You denounce my behaviour as cruel towards you," exclaimed Charles: "but did you not first provoke me, father?—did you not call me harsh names? And if, in return, I complained of what I considered to be the unnatural conduct of my parents toward me——"

"Wherefore thus pertinaciously endeavour to penetrate into those secrets which, for good and salutary reasons, your parents keep concealed from you?" demanded Mr. Hatfield: "for I presume that you allude to the fact of our still desiring that you should pass as our nephew."

"You have assured me that I am legitimate—that there is no stigma upon my birth," cried Charles;—"then wherefore not acknowledge me as your son? You claim from me the duty of a son—and yet you deny me the title! And again I must remind you, father, that to an accident alone am I indebted for the knowledge of my birth!"

"I would ask you, Charles," said Mr. Hatfield, in a serious and impressive tone, "what all this has to do with the proposal of marriage that you made to Lady Frances Ellingham: for it was on *this* point that our dispute commenced yesterday morning. Am

I to suppose that my son, being unwilling to contract an alliance so honourable to him, seeks other grounds whereon to base his design of flying in the face of his parents?—am I to conclude that, being resolved to thwart us in this—our dearest hope, you seize upon another and ignoble pretext to justify your rebellion against us!"

"No—ten thousand times *No!*" exclaimed the young man, cruelly hurt by these suspicions. "In the first place, I do not love Lady Frances Ellingham otherwise than as a brother may love a sister——"

"Because," interrupted Mr. Hatfield, fixing his eyes sternly upon his son,—“because you have formed some connexion of which you are ashamed——"

"Ah!" cried Charles, starting violently. "Has my father acted the spy upon me?"

"Listen," said Mr. Hatfield, to whose countenance the indignant blood rushed as his son thus insolently addressed him: but he chose to controul his feelings—and he succeeded: "listen, Charles—and then decide whether you ought to judge me so harshly. Your conduct of yesterday morning towards your mother and myself was of such an extraordinary—unaccountable—distressing nature, that you cannot blame me if I resolved to discover the motives that had actuated you. In this determination I was fixed by your protracted absence throughout the day—your stealthy return in the evening—your short visit to your own chamber—your avoidance of all the inmates of this house—and your hasty and also stealthy departure again. I confess, then, that I followed you last evening——"

"You followed me, father?" repeated Charles, in a low, hoarse, and hollow voice.

"Yes—I followed you to Suffolk Street," continued Mr. Hatfield, with a firmness and a cool determination of tone and manner which he hoped would overawe the rebellious young man: "and, on inquiry in the neighbourhood, I learnt that at the house which you entered, dwells a very beautiful young lady. Now, I give you my honour, Charles, that I asked no more—was told no more than this one fact. I have no desire to become acquainted with the *liaisons* of my son:—indeed, I know that young men will be—what shall we call it?—*gay*, if you will. All I wished to ascertain was whether there were any grounds for supposing that you had formed a connexion which you may believe to have *love* for its basis, and which induced you yesterday morning to refuse the fulfilment of your own offer to Lady Frances Ellingham."

"Father," said Charles Hatfield, scarcely able to restrain an outburst of indignation, reproach, and bitter recrimination,—in which, had he allowed that torrent of feelings to force a vent, all that he knew of his family and their secrets would have been revealed, or rather proclaimed, in no measured terms;—"father," he said, fortunately subduing the evil promptings of the moment,—“I have listened to you with attention—though not without impatience. Yesterday you reviled me—you heaped bitter reproaches upon me—you menaced me with disinheritance: then, in the evening, you enacted the spy upon my actions—you watched me—you followed me——"

"It was my duty—and a most painful one, I can assure you," interrupted Mr. Hatfield, alarmed by the strange—the ominous coldness that characterised his son's tone and manner.

"Your duty!" ejaculated Charles, now speaking with an indignation that burst forth in frightful contrast with the unnatural tranquillity on which it so

abruptly broke; "and wherefore have you not performed your duty in all things? Duty, indeed! But know, father, that there are other duties to fulfil than merely playing the part of a spy on your son's actions:—there are such duties as giving him his proper name—allowing him to assume his just rights—and placing him in that social position which he ought to occupy! You menace me with the loss of fortune, father?—Oh! you know how vain and ridiculous is this threat—and how it aggravates the wickedness of all your former conduct towards me! I am no longer a child to be held in leading-strings—no longer a silly sentimentalist who, through maudlin and mawkish feelings of a false delicacy, will consent to have my nearest and dearest interests trampled upon—my privileges altogether withheld—my rights cruelly denied me! You have played the mysterious too long,—you have enacted the cruel and unnatural until endurance has become impossible;—and now you would assume the part of the absolute dictator—expecting to find me still a pliant, docile, grovelling slave,—without spirit—without courage—without even the common feelings of a man! But you are mistaken, father:—and if I have thus been driven to tell you my mind, you have only yourself to reproach, for so distressing—so painful a scene!"

Thus speaking,—and before his father had so far recovered from the amazement into which this volley of words threw him, as to be able even to stretch out a hand to retain him,—Charles seized his hat, and rushed from the room.

In less than a minute the front-door of the house closed behind him; and he hurried on, like one demented, to Suffolk Street.

But before we accompany him thither, we must pause to explain the effect which this scene had upon his father.

Indeed, Mr. Hatfield was struck with an astonishment so profound—a bewilderment so complete, that his heart seemed as if it were numbed against pain. He could not comprehend the drift of Charles's passionate address,—otherwise than by supposing that the young man required to be recognised as a son, and not as a nephew. For it did not—as, in fact, it could not—for a single moment enter Mr. Hatfield's head that Charles had discovered all the occurrences of former years, and that he had thence drawn the false and fatal inference that he—this same infatuated young man—was the heir to the proud title and vast estates of the Earldom of Ellingham. He therefore saw in his son's conduct only the rebellious spirit of an individual who, having formed a connexion of which he was most likely ashamed and which he knew to be improper, endeavoured to meet his parents' reproaches with recriminations, and seize upon the least shadow of an excuse or pretext for resisting the paternal authority.

When reflection thus diminished the wonderment which Mr. Hatfield experienced at the behaviour of the young man, pain and sorrow succeeded that first feeling. Indeed, the unhappy father was cruelly embarrassed: he knew not how to act. Charles was of that age when,—even did circumstances permit Mr. Hatfield to acknowledge that he really was his son,—no legal authority could be exercised, nor constraint practised; and he felt assured that any farther attempt to interfere with him in the connexion which he had formed, would only aggravate the irritability of the wrong-headed young man.

Then again, it was impossible to abandon him thus to courses which might hurry him on to utter ruin;—

and moreover, the Lady Frances Ellingham had been so cruelly trifled with, that an explanation with her parents became absolutely necessary.

Now was it that Mr. Hatfield cursed the hour when he had been induced to leave Italy, and return to England on this visit to his half-brother—a visit which the Earl had by letter urged him to pay, and to which he had assented in full confidence of the complete safety of the step.

Bewildered with the variety of his conflicting thoughts, and feeling the necessity as well as recognising the propriety of consulting the Earl, Mr. Hatfield repaired to the library, whence he despatched a message to the nobleman requesting his lordship to join him there as speedily as possible:—for it still wanted upwards of half-an-hour to the usual breakfast time.

The Earl of Ellingham was just issuing from his chamber when the message was delivered to him; and, immediately apprehending some evil news, he hastened to the library, where he found his half-brother pacing up and down in an agitated manner.

Mr. Hatfield, without any disguise, hesitation, or circumlocution, immediately unfolded to the Earl all that had taken place, both on that and the preceding day, in respect to Charles;—and Arthur listened with emotions of mingled pain, astonishment, and apprehension.

"Much as it would have delighted me," he at length observed, "to witness the union of my daughter and your son, Thomas, I cannot for a moment recommend that the young man's inclinations should be forced. Such an union seemed necessary—almost imperiously necessary under the peculiar circumstances in which we are placed. While you, the elder brother, renounce the title which is your just right—I, the younger one, have long borne it and bear it still;—though, heaven knows that I value it indeed but little.—However," added the Earl, interrupting himself hastily,—“I was about to observe that, situated as we thus are, it appears but natural and proper that your son should receive a positive and acknowledged admission into the family by means of an alliance with my daughter. And she, poor girl—she loves him,” continued the nobleman, his voice faltering; “and he has acted unwisely—to use no harsher term—in declaring an attachment which he does not feel, and making a proposal which he cannot accomplish.”

“I am at a loss how to act!” said Mr. Hatfield. “My God!” he cried, in a tone expressive of deep feeling, “am I ever to be the means of giving annoyance and vexation to you, my dear Arthur,—you, who have been so kind and generous a friend to me?”

“Not on *this* account must you distress yourself, Thomas,” returned the Earl, emphatically: “you are not responsible for the wayward humours of your son. But surely this sudden manifestation of a rebellious disposition on his part, cannot arise wholly and solely from the connexion which you believe him to have formed. Have you enquired concerning the character of the women—the mother and daughter—whom he visits in Suffolk-street?”

“No: I contented myself with ascertaining that at the house which I saw him enter, there is a young lady of very extraordinary beauty.”

“And are you convinced that Charles has learnt nothing relative to the events of former years—nothing calculated to diminish—”

“I understand you, Arthur,” said Mr. Hatfield, seeing that his half-brother hesitated: “you would ask

whether I have any reason to believe that he has learnt aught which may have a tendency to diminish the respect he had until within these two days past maintained towards his parents? On this head I am of course unable to answer you positively: but my impression is that he is as much as ever in the dark relative to the dread occurrences of the past. Indeed, how can he have possibly learnt a single fact—"

"May not the discovery that he is your son, and not your nephew, have induced him to seek for farther information?" enquired the Earl of Ellingham. "May not some sentiment of ardent curiosity have been awakened within him—"

"But where could he address himself to this task of raising the veil from the mysteries of by-gone years—even if he have the slightest ground to suspect that such mysteries do exist?" demanded Mr. Hatfield, interrupting the Earl. "To what source could he repair for the means of elucidation?"

"I know not: and yet—I am now impressed with suspicions of a most unpleasant nature," observed the Earl. "It is very essential that some immediate step should be taken to redeem this fine young man from a career of error—perhaps of depravity—"

"Oh! yes—yes!" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield. "My God! if the sins of the father be in this case visited upon the son, life will become intolerable to me!—Rather would I at once have a full and complete understanding with Charles,—tell him all—yes, all,—reveal to him who I really am—open to him the means of a complete retrospection, embracing all my sad history,—and then throw myself on his mercy—implore him at least to have pity upon his innocent mother, if not on me who am so guilty!"

"No—no, Thomas: this humiliation may not be!" ejaculated the Earl. "For if, as you believe, your son has at present no suspicion of the past, it would be madness to make unnecessary revelations."

"I am bewildered—crucially perplexed: I know not how to act!" cried Mr. Hatfield. "Oh! if I were confident that he has no such suspicions—that he has learnt or surmised nothing calculated to diminish the respect due to his mother and myself—"

"How can he have fathomed the obscurity which hangs over your former life?" demanded the Earl. "And as to supposing that he could, by any possible means, obtain even the shadow of an idea of your real birth and parentage—"

"No: for the papers—those important papers which I gave you years ago, and which I requested you to destroy,—those papers, I say," exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, "could alone make such important revelations to my son: and, thank heaven! they are not in existence."

"My dear brother," returned the Earl of Ellingham, taking Mr. Hatfield's hand, and speaking in a very serious tone, "I must frankly and honestly inform you that those papers have not been destroyed. At the same time, they have been kept in a place of perfect security—a secret recess known only to myself—"

"And wherefore were not such dangerous documents burnt—annihilated!" asked Mr. Hatfield, in a reproachful tone.

"I dared not perform a deed which would argue so much selfishness on my part," replied the Earl of Ellingham, now speaking with a strong emphasis—the result and impulse of his generous, lofty, honourable feelings. "So long as those papers remain in existence, you, my dear brother, can at any moment

say to me, '*I repent of the step which I took in renouncing my just rights and privileges; and I now claim them:*'—and should you at any time thus address me, it would only be for me to produce the papers that establish your claims."

"Oh! Arthur, you are generous—even to a fault!" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield. "You know—or, at least, I again assure you for the hundredth time, that not for worlds would I heap disgrace on a noble name by daring to assume it! Merciful heavens! shall the coronet which becomes you so well, be snatched from your brows, and transferred to those of—"

"Hush! Thomas—hush! this excitement is most unnecessary," interrupted the Earl. "You must not blame me for the motives which induced me to keep the documents;—and now—if you will have them restored to you—"

"Yes—yes: give them to me, Arthur," cried Mr. Hatfield, resolving to destroy the papers without farther delay.

"You claim them—they are your's—and they shall at once be returned into your hands," said the nobleman. "But I conjure you to act not hastily nor rashly—"

"Fear nothing, Arthur," exclaimed Mr. Hatfield: "but give me the papers! There is no time to lose—the ladies will be waiting for us at the breakfast-table—"

"True!" ejaculated the Earl: and, approaching that shelf at the back of which the secret recess was formed, he said, "Once every year have I inspected this well concealed depository: once every year have I assured myself that the precious documents were safe;—and on those occasions, I have cleansed them of the dust which even accumulates in a place that is almost hermetically sealed."

As the Earl thus spoke, he took down from the shelf the books which stood immediately before the recess; and Mr. Hatfield, receiving the volumes in his hands, placed them upon the table. While performing this simple and almost mechanical act, his eyes were suddenly attracted to the name and date of one of the books;—and his looks were rivetted, as it were, on the words—"Annual Register, 1827."

For the nature of the volume and the date of the year whose incidents it recorded, suddenly revived the poignancy of many bitter recollections, the sharpness of which had been somewhat blunted by time: and it was in a moment of strange nervousness—or idiosyncratic excitement, that he opened the book which thus had aroused those painful memories.

An ejaculation of horror—irrepressible horror—escaped his lips: for he had lighted on the very page which contained the account of his *Execution* at Horse-monger Lane:—and at the very same instant a cry of mingled amazement and alarm burst from the Earl of Ellingham.

"Oh! is this a mere accident?" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield: "or a warning—"

"Merciful heaven—the papers!" ejaculated the nobleman.

"A warning that my son has seen this?" added the unhappy father, almost distracted with the idea.

"Some miscreant has done this!" cried the Earl, stamping his foot with rage: and it was seldom that he thus gave way to his passion.

The brothers turned towards each other—exchanging hasty glances of mutual and anxious enquiry.

"The papers are gone!" said the Earl, clasping his hands in despair.

"Gone!" repeated Mr. Hatfield, staggering as if struck by a sudden blow. "And this book—this book," he faltered, in a faint tone, "was 'in the immediate vicinity of the recess! He who took the papers—might have read also—in that volume—the terrible account—"

Mr. Hatfield could say no more: overpowered by his feelings, he sank exhausted on the nearest seat.

The Earl glanced at the open page which his half-brother had indicated; and, observing the nature of the statement there recorded, he instantly comprehended the cause of Mr. Hatfield's emotions, and also of the suspicions which had suddenly seized upon him.

"Yes—yes: this book has been read lately," said Arthur, in an excited and hurried manner: "behold! the corners of the covers have been recently injured. Oh! my God! what does all this mean?"

It will be recollected that on the memorable night when Charles Hatfield pursued his successful researches in the library, he had hurled away from him, in his rage and almost maddening grief, the volume that made such strange—such appalling revelations: and the violence of the action had so far injured the book, as to bend and graze the corners of the binding,—the marks of the injury remaining clearly visible, and the white interior of the leather being laid bare, and thus proving how recently the work had been used.

"The book has been read very lately," murmured Mr. Hatfield, in a musing tone; "and the papers have perhaps been stolen lately—"

"Yes," exclaimed the Earl: "for not a month has elapsed since I inspected that recess and found them safe."

"Then who could have done this?" cried Mr. Hatfield, starting from his seat, in a sudden access of excitement which was accompanied by a return of moral and physical energy. "Oh! is it possible that Charles is the author of all that seems so mysterious? Has he searched for the records of my earlier life?—has he by accident discovered and purloined those papers—those fatal papers?"

"Yes—it must be he!" exclaimed the Earl: "for did you not tell me that he spoke of claims—and rights—and privileges unjustly withheld,—and that he has harped upon what he termed the unnatural conduct of his parents in concealing from him the secret of his birth? Thomas—my dear Thomas," continued Lord Ellingham, speaking in a lower—more measured—and more impressive tone, "I can see it all! That young man has found out who you are: he has learnt that you are the rightful heir to the honours and estates which I enjoy;—and, believing himself to be your legitimate son—according to the assurance that you were forced, for your wife's sake, to give him—the deluded, deceived Charles Hatfield fancies himself to be the lawful heir to the Earldom!"

"You have divined the truth, Arthur!" cried Mr. Hatfield, his heart wrung to its very core by all the maddening fears and torturing reflections which were thus suddenly excited within him. "Oh! what dreadful embarrassments—what frightful complications, will this misapprehension entail on my unhappy son—on you—on me—on all who are connected with us!"

"There is not a moment to lose!" exclaimed Lord Ellingham. "We must hasten after this infatuated young man—"

At that moment the door opened; and Clarence Villiers entered the library—the Earl having requested

him on the previous day to visit him at the hour when, true to the appointment, he thus made his appearance.

Villiers, perceiving at the first glance, that something unusual was agitating Lord Ellingham and Mr. Hatfield, was about to retire, when the Earl, beckoning him to advance, turned hastily round to his half-brother, and said in a hurried whisper, "We will entrust this matter to Villiers: he will conduct it with less excitement than you and I; and, as he knows your secret—"

"Yes;—but all he *does* know is that the Mr. Hatfield of to-day is identical with the Thomas Rainford of former times," interrupted the Earl's half-brother, also speaking in a low and hasty tone: "remember—he is unacquainted with aught of our family secrets—ignorant of the parentage of Charles—"

"Neither is it necessary that he should be made acquainted with all these facts," interrupted Arthur:—"but leave the matter to me." Then, turning towards Clarence, he said, "My dear Mr. Villiers, you come most opportunely to render us an important service. We have every reason to believe that Charles has formed an improper connexion with a young female of great beauty, residing with her mother in very handsome lodgings in Suffolk Street: we likewise conclude that *she* is there at this present moment. Hasten thither, my good friend—demand an immediate interview with Charles—and tell him that certain discoveries have been made at home, in which he is deeply interested. In a word, compel him to accompany you away from the designing women who have doubtless entangled him in their meshes—"

"Nay: let us not judge hastily," cried Mr. Hatfield: "remember—I have heard nothing against the characters of these ladies; and it may be a virtuous and honest affection, after all, that renders Charles a visitor at their house. Let Mr. Villiers, then, act with circumspection—and behave with the strictest courtesy towards these ladies, should he encounter them."

"Yes—but under any circumstances you must persuade Charles to return with you immediately to this house," said the Earl. "Mr. Hatfield will acquaint you with the precise address of the lodgings in Suffolk Street—"

The Earl's half-brother mentioned the number of the dwelling to which he had traced his son on the preceding evening;—adding, "The name of the ladies is Fitzhardinge—and I heard that the daughter bears the singular denomination of *Perdita*."

"Perdita!" cried Villiers, starting violently. "Oh! if this be the case—unhappy, lost Charles Hatfield!"

"Good heavens! what mean you?" demanded the wretched father, rendered terribly anxious by those ominous words that fell on his ears like a death-knell.

"Two ladies—mother and daughter—dwelling together—and the girl named *Perdita*," mused Clarence Villiers, not immediately heeding the earnest appeal of Mr. Hatfield: "yes—yes—it must be they!—my aunt—my wretched, wretched aunt who has returned from transportation—and her profligate but beautiful daughter!"

"Do you mean that Mrs. Slingsby who—years ago—you know to what I allude?" asked Mr. Hatfield, in a hurried tone, as he grasped Clarence violently by the wrist.

"Yes—I *do* mean that bad woman!" exclaimed Villiers, who had now become painfully excited in his turn: "and I regret—Oh! I regret to say that one

has brought over to England her daughter, whom report mentions as an angel of beauty and a demon in profligacy——"

"My God! Mr. Villiers—save Charles—save my Charles from these incarnate fiends!" cried Mr. Hatfield. "Or I myself——"

And he was rushing to the door of the library, when the Earl held him back, saying, "No, Thomas—you must not go in this excited state: let Villiers take the affair in hand."

Mr. Hatfield fell back into a seat, a prey to the most painful—the most agonising emotions; while Clarence hurriedly departed to execute the commission entrusted to him.

The Earl now addressed himself to the task of consoling his unfortunate brother-in-law;—and he had just succeeded in inducing Mr. Hatfield to assume as composed a demeanour as possible, preparatory to their joint appearance at the breakfast-table, when Clarence Villiers rushed into the room.

Not a quarter of an hour had elapsed since his departure;—and this speedy return, together with his agitated manner, raised new alarms in the breasts of the Earl and Mr. Hatfield.

"They are gone—fled—all three together!" cried Villiers, throwing himself exhausted on an ottoman, and panting for breath.

"Gone!" repeated the miserable father, surveying Clarence with eyes that stared wildly and unnaturally.

"Yes—gone!" said Villiers. "Ten minutes before I reached Suffolk Street, my aunt, her daughter, and Mr. Charles departed in a post-chaise, which had been sent for apparently in consequence of some sudden plan: for the people of the house were previously unacquainted with the intention of their lodgers thus to leave so abruptly."

"But where was the chaise hired? and which road has it taken?" demanded Mr. Hatfield, now manifesting an energy and determination that proved his readiness to meet the emergency and adopt measures to pursue the fugitives.

"I sought for that information in vain," returned Clarence Villiers. "It appears that my aunt herself went out to order the post-chaise; and that care was taken not to allow the people of the house any opportunity to converse with the post-boys. The rent and other liabilities were all duly paid; and the landlady of the lodgings accordingly makes no complaint of the women who have quitted her abode."

"What course do you intend to adopt?" hastily demanded the Earl, turning to his half-brother.

"Order me your best horse to be saddled forthwith," said Mr. Hatfield; "and I will proceed in pursuit of the runaways. 'Tis ten to one that I will obtain some trace of them. Perhaps Mr. Villiers will likewise mount horse, and take the northern road."

"While I shall do the same, and pursue a westerly direction," observed the Earl.

"Good: for it was my intention to choose the route towards Dover," added Mr. Hatfield. "And now one word more, Arthur," he continued, the moment Villiers had left the room to give the necessary orders respecting the horses: "as it is probable that we may recover and reclaim my self-willed son—and as, in that case, penitence on his part might induce you to forgive this absurd freak, so that the result may yet be favourable to our nearest and dearest wishes,—under all these circumstances, I say, suffer not Frances to learn aught disparaging to his character."

"I understand you, Thomas," exclaimed the Earl,

wringing his half-brother's hand in token of cordial assent to this proposition. "I will even speak as warily and cautiously as I may to my wife;—while, on your side——"

"Oh! I must tell every thing to Georgiana," said Mr. Hatfield: "suspense and uncertainty would be intolerable to her. I shall now seek her for the purpose of making a hasty but most sad communication: and then away in pursuit of the ingrate!"

A quarter of an hour afterwards, the Earl of Ellingham, Mr. Hatfield, and Clarence Villiers—all three equipped for their journeys—repaired to the nobleman's stables in the immediate vicinity of the mansion;—and thence they speedily issued forth, well mounted, and each taking a separate direction.

CHAPTER CXLI.

THE FLIGHT.

Uron breaking away from the presence of his father, in the manner already described, Charles Hatfield hurried to the house in Suffolk Street; and bursting into the room where Mrs. Fitzhardinge and Perdita were seated at breakfast, he exclaimed, "I have at length thrown off all allegiance to my parents;—and I must now act wholly and solely for my own interests."

"Not altogether for *your own*, Charles—dear Charles," said Perdita, fixing upon him a plaintive and half-reproachful look, which made her appear ravishingly beautiful in his eyes.

"No—not altogether for myself will I act," he cried, embracing her tenderly; "but for thee also, my angel—yes, for thee whom I love—adore—worship!"

"What has occurred this morning to render your lordship thus agitated?" enquired Mrs. Fitzhardinge.

"Oh! a quarrel with my father," exclaimed Charles, who, in the enthusiasm of his blind devotion to Perdita, had forgotten the old woman's presence. "He has played the part of a spy upon me—he has followed me to your door—he knows that I visit you—and he will doubtless endeavour to cause a breach between us!"

"Let us depart hence—now—at a moment's warning!" cried Perdita. "We have ample funds for the purpose. Last night a money-lender discounted your note, Charles: and I have the proceeds safe in my own keeping."

"Fortune favours us, then!" said the infatuated young man. "Yes—we will depart without delay: we will hasten to some retired place where we can deliberate, fearless of interruption, on the course which it will now be necessary for me to pursue."

"I will hasten to order a post-chaise," observed Mrs. Fitzhardinge. "This task had better be performed by myself—so that we may leave behind us no trace of the route we shall have taken."

"Thanks—a thousand thanks, my dear madam!" cried Charles: then, when the old woman had left the room, he caught Perdita in his arms and pressing her fondly to his bosom, said, "My parents are resolved to force me into a marriage with Lady Frances Ellingham—they would separate me from you——"

"Oh! Charles—were such a destiny in store for me," said Perdita, affecting to be melted to tears. "I should not be able to bear up against the misfortune. For on you are all my hopes now fixed,—to you have



I given my heart—irrevocably given it;—and were you the veriest mendicant on the face of the earth, I would never cease to love you as now I love!"

"Adored Perdita!" cried the young man, enraptured by the tender words and the enchanting manner of the syren, as he strained her to his breast and imprinted a thousand kisses on her brow, her cheeks, and her lips. "Oh! never—never could I prove faithless to thee, my beloved Perdita! Would that you were mine indissolubly—that you were mine by the rites of the Church and the sanction of the law;—for then we might defy the world to separate us!"

"Would you have me renounce the peculiar opinions which I have formed?" asked Perdita, her heart palpitating with joy—for the young man had thus, of his own accord, broached the delicate subject on which she longed to speak, yet knew not how to begin. "Because, if such be your wish, my beloved Charles, I will make even the sacrifice of my strongest prejudices to your heart's desire—"

"Now, indeed, do I know that you love me, sweetest—dearest girl!" interrupted Charles, experiencing ineffable happiness at the idea of possessing the beautiful Perdita on terms which would not render him ashamed of his connexion. "Yes—yes;

I do demand that sacrifice at your hands; and, if you yield to my wishes in this respect, I shall receive your assent as the most eloquent—the most convincing proof of the attachment you avow! And, moreover, Perdita—dearest, dearest Perdita—I shall be so rejoiced to place a coronet on that fair brow of thine,—so proud to present thee to the world as my wife! Never—never will enraptured husband have experienced a triumph so complete as that which will be mine, when I shall conduct thee—so radiant, so dazzling in thy beauty—amongst the friends whom the declaration of my rank will gather around me,—and when I shall introduce thee, adored one, as the Viscountess Marston! Yes—I shall indeed be proud of thee, my angel; and now—will you not breathe the word that is to promise me all this triumph and all this joy?—will you not say, 'Charles, for thy sake, I will accompany thee to the altar, and wed thee according to the rites of the Protestant Church and the exigencies of the community.'

"Oh! not for another instant can I hesitate, my beloved—my handsome—my generous Charles!" exclaimed the syren, casting her arms round his neck, and pressing him as if in rapture to her glowing bosom: then, in the sweetest intonations

of her melodious voice, she said, "Yes—Charles, for thy sake, I will accompany thee to the altar, and will wed thee according to the rites of the Protestant Church and the usages of that society in which we live!"

"Now am I supremely happy!" cried Charles Hatfield, his tone and manner fully corroborating his words. "We will repair to Paris, my beloved Perdita—for there we can be united by the chaplain of the British Embassy without an instant's unnecessary delay; and thence also can I write to my father, solemnly and formally calling upon him to assert his right to the peerage which he has so long permitted his younger brother to usurp. And in Paris my Perdita will be the cynosure of all interest—"

"Oh! yes—let us visit that delightful city of which I have heard so much!" interrupted the young woman, her eyes gleaming resplendently with the pleasing sensations excited by the idea. "But I must now leave you for a moment, to prepare for this sudden journey—as my mother cannot be long before she returns."

Perdita rose from the sofa, and hastened from the room, kissing her hand with playful fondness to her lover as she crossed the threshold. Even that simple action on her part excited the most ravishing feelings in his soul;—for as she thus turned round for an instant ere the door closed behind her, his looks swept all the fulness—all the contours—all the rich proportions of her voluptuous form,—while the morning sun-light, rosy from the hues of the hangings through which it penetrated, shone on her beauteous countenance, giving splendour to the fine large eyes, freshness to the vermilion lips, and a halo to her glossy hair!

She disappeared; and Charles, who had risen from his seat simultaneously with herself, advanced to the window. The street was quiet;—but the sounds of the rapid vehicles in Cockspur Street met his ears;—and he wondered whether the postchaise were yet approaching the dwelling.

This idea led him to ponder on the step which he was about to take;—and a sensation of sadness slowly crept upon him, as he reflected that he was on the point of leaving his home—abandoning his parents and friends! The recollection of his mother smote him—smote him painfully;—and yet he did not seek by inward, silent reasoning to improve this better state of feeling, and act upon its warnings. No:—with that perverseness which so frequently characterises those who are on the point of adopting a measure which they secretly know to be injudicious and unwisely precipitate—even if no worse,—he sought in sophistry and specious mental argument an apology for his conduct. Again he reminded himself that his parents had acted unnaturally towards him,—and that their uniform conduct in this respect had now been followed up by harshness, upbraidings, menaces, and *espionnage*, on the part of his father. Then he fed his imagination with the thoughts of possessing Perdita:—in a few days she would be his—irrevocably his,—and in a manner which would enable him to present her proudly to the world as his wedded wife. From this strain of meditations he glided into glorious, gorgeous visions of future greatness:—the words, "My Lord," and "Your Lordship," only so recently addressed to him, sounded like delicious music in his ears;—and his painful reflections were subdued by the feelings of triumph now once more awakened within him. Love—ambition—hope,—all—his yearnings, all his cravings, were now on the point of

being gratified: he should cast off that parental yoke which had latterly weighed so heavily upon him;—he was about to visit Paris—he would appear as a Viscount, and with a beauteous bride, in the sphere of fashion the most refined, elegance the most perfect, and civilisation the most consummate,—and he already fancied himself walking in the delicious gardens of the Tuileries, with Perdita—the observed of all observers—leaning fondly on his arm!

These visions—sweeping like a gorgeous pageantry through his excited imagination—brought him to that state of mind, in which all regrets were banished—all remorse was forgotten;—and when Perdita returned to the apartment, ready attired for the journey, he flew towards her—he wound his arms around her wasp-like waist, and pressed her enthusiastically to his bosom.

This was the first time that he had seen her in a walking-dress;—and he thought that she even appeared more ravishingly beautiful than when in her morning *deshabille*, or her drawing-room garb. The pink crape bonnet, adorned with artificial flowers, set off her fine countenance with such admirable effect:—the flowing drapery of the elegant summer-shawl meandered over the proportions of the symmetrical form—developing each contour with its wavy undulations:—and the straw-coloured kid gloves, fitting tightly to a fault, described the shape of the beautiful tapering fingers.

"You are lovely beyond the loveliness of woman!" murmured Charles Hatfield, surveying her with an admiration the most unfeigned—the most sincere.

"And you, Charles—are not you my own handsome, dearly beloved Charles—so soon to be my husband?" asked Perdita. "You said just now that you should be proud to present me as your wife to your friends:—Oh! I feel—yes, I feel that I shall also be proud to be so pre-ented. My mind seems to have undergone a complete change since I made you that promise to wed you at the altar;—and you must forget, dear Charles, that I ever wished it otherwise!"

Hatfield, for all answer, impressed a burning kiss upon her rosy lips;—and the young woman's eyes became soft and melting in expression—voluptuous and languid with desire.

At this instant her mother returned, with the announcement that the post-chaise would be at the door in less than a quarter of an hour; and the old woman hastened to the bed-rooms to pack up the trunks. Her daughter, who kept the purse, then gave her the necessary money to liquidate all liabilities due to the landlady of the house; and while this was being done, Perdita placed the gold and Bank-notes in Charles's hand, saying, "In the excitement of the morning's incidents I forgot to tender you this amount before."

"Henceforth all that I have is yours equally, my beloved," said the young man, as he secured the money about his person.

The post-chaise-and-four now appeared; and while the trunks were being strapped on to the vehicle, Mrs. Fitzhardinge superintended the process, apparently with the bustling officiousness of an old woman of particular habits, but in reality to prevent any communication between the post-boys and the people of the dwelling;—for she knew how inquisitive lodging-house keepers were apt to be, and that postilions were proportionately communicative.

At length all the arrangements were completed;—Charles handed his Perdita into the vehicle—manifested the same politeness towards the old mother—and then entered it himself. Mrs. Fitzhardinge had

CHAPTER CXLII.

THE DRESS-MAKER: A LOVE STORY.

placed herself with her back to the horses, on an imperious sign from Perdita to that effect;—so that the young couple were next to each other on the same seat.

The post-chaise rolled rapidly away from Suffolk Street, and passed down Whitehall towards Westminster Bridge. So long as the wheels rattled over the stones, but little conversation took place inside the vehicle,—though Charles and Perdita conveyed to each other many tender assurances by means of the eloquent language of the eyes and the pressure of hands. When, however, the chaise emerged from the more crowded thoroughfares of the metropolis, and entered upon the Dover Road, the travelling party were enabled to discourse at ease.

The day was very sultry;—but the upper part of the barouche was now thrown open; and the speed at which they travelled, created a current of air that mitigated the intensity of the heat. However, Perdita put up her parasol; and as the faces of the happy pair were not very far apart, the silk canopy, circumscribed though it were, shaded those fine countenances which really seemed made to be side by side with each other,—both being so handsome!

For a short time the conversation was general amongst the three:—gradually, however, Mrs. Fitzhardinge was, as it were, excluded from its range—not rudely so,—but because it became of a tender description between the young gentleman and her daughter;—and then it languished somewhat, inasmuch as the old woman was a restraint upon them.

At length there was a pause altogether; but still Charles and Perdita felt no weariness in each other's society. They gazed on each other—drinking draughts of love in each other's looks,—and often pressing each other's hands.

For Perdita really loved the young man,—loved him with a deep and ardent affection, of which however sensuality formed no inconsiderable portion. Nevertheless, she *did* love him after the fashion of her own heart;—and thus to some extent the snarer had become ensnared!

It was in a humour of melting and voluptuous languor, that, suddenly breaking the silence noticed above, Perdita said in her soft, dulcet tones, "Charles, how delicious is it to travel in this manner! Do you know that I feel as if I should like you to repeat to me a piece of poetry—or tell me some interesting tale—for it is so sweet to hear the sound of your voice. But if you thus gratify my caprice—this whim of the moment—let the theme of your recitation be love!"

"I will endeavour to please you, my charmer," returned the young man;—"and at this moment I bethink me of a Love Story that I wrote myself some few years ago—one day, when the mania for scribbling suddenly seized upon me."

"Oh! that will be truly delightful!" exclaimed Perdita. "A story of your own composition! Begin, Charles—dear Charles: I am dying to hear this specimen of your abilities."

"I am afraid it will prove but a poor one," returned Hatfield. "At the same time, such as it is, I will repeat it."

Mrs. Fitzhardinge, having overheard this dialogue, intimated the pleasure she should experience in listening to the tale;—and as the chaise was now rolling along a road rendered, as it were, soft by the accumulation of the dust of summer, Charles was not compelled to pitch his voice to a key unpleasantly high, in relating the ensuing narrative.

"It was between nine and ten o'clock on a dark and rainy night, in the month of November, 1834, that a young female, plainly but decently attired, was wending her way along Oxford Street. She had a large parcel beneath her cloak;—and this parcel she protected against the rain with the most jealous care,—thinking more, in fact, of the object of her solicitude than of picking her path with sufficient nicety to enable her to avoid the puddles of water that were ankle-deep in some parts of the pavement—but more especially at the crossings. For, in sooth, it was a bitter—bitter night:—the windows of heaven appeared to be indeed opened, and the rain fell in torrents. The streets seemed to be positively covered in with an arcade of umbrellas, on which the quick drops rattled down with the violence of hail. The young female whom I have mentioned, had an umbrella;—but she found it rather a difficult task to hold it comfortably with one hand, while her left arm encircled as it were the precious parcel beneath her cloak. For the passengers in the streets of London are never over remarkable for their civility to each other—still less so on such a night as the one I am describing. The consequence was that there was an incessant struggle amongst the strong to push their umbrellas safely through the mass, and amongst the weak to prevent their own umbrellas from being dragged out of their hands;—but it naturally happened that the latter fared the worst.

"The young female was meek, timid, and unobtrusive. She only sought to be permitted to pursue her way in peace, without being molested;—for, heaven knows! she had not the least desire on her part to inconvenience a soul. But first some rude, hulking fellow would thrust her against the houses—almost through the shop windows; then, if she moved over to the kerb-stone of the pavement, she found herself speedily pushed into the mud. To pursue a middle course was impossible; because the two streams of persons carrying umbrellas were the monopolists there;—and so the young female began to lament the necessity which had sent her forth into the streets on such a night as this. At length she reached the iron gates leading into Hanover Square; and she rejoiced—for she thought within herself that she had now got clear of the crowd, and need entertain no farther apprehension of having the precious parcel knocked out of her hands. But just as she entered the Square, a rude, coarse fellow rushed against her as he was running hastily round the corner; and such was the violence of the concussion, that the parcel was knocked from beneath her arm. The ruffian who had caused the accident, burst into a ferocious laugh, as if he had just performed a most humorous or clever feat, and darted away. But the young female was disconsolate at what had occurred; and tears started into her eyes. Though bruised and hurt by the man's violence, she thought not of herself—she felt no pain:—it was on account of the parcel that she was so deeply grieved. Hastily picking it up, she hurried to the nearest lamp; and the moment she examined the packet beneath the gas-light, she found her worst apprehensions confirmed. For the parcel contained a costly silk dress, well wrapped up in brown paper;—but the side on which it had fallen was dripping wet and covered with mud!

"O heavens! no food *again* to-night!" exclaimed the young female aloud—for in her despair she paused not to notice whether she were noticed or overheard. And she *was* both noticed and overheard,—and by a tall, handsome individual, of gentlemanly appearance, and muffled in a capacious cloak. He had issued from the nearest house at the moment the accident occurred; and, perceiving the brutality of the encounter, though too late to prevent it or to chastise the perpetrator, he stood still to observe the young female, whose countenance, as the rays of the lamp fell upon it, struck him as being remarkably beautiful. In that rapid survey, partial as it was by the flickering light, which was moreover dimmed by the mist of the falling rain, the stranger fancied that he perceived—independently of the despair which that countenance now wore—a certain settled melancholy expression, that at once rivetted his interest and excited his sympathies. But when those words—so terrible in their meaning,—*"O heavens! no food again to-night!"* fell upon his ears, he accosted the young female, and said, in a tone of respectful though somewhat condescending pity, "My poor girl, it appears that a sad accident has befallen you."—The young woman, or rather girl—for she was not more than eighteen years of age—looked up into the face of the individual who thus addressed her; and, perceiving that it was no insolent coxcomb who spoke, she replied in a tone of deep melancholy, "Yes, sir: it is to me a great misfortune!"—The stranger read, or fancied he read, an entire history in those few and plaintively uttered words,—how, perhaps, a young dress-maker had toiled to finish a particular piece of work in the hope of receiving instantaneous payment on taking it home,—how the article had been thrown down, soiled, and rendered at least unfit to be delivered that night to its owner, even if it were not spoilt altogether,—and how the poor girl had lost her only chance of obtaining the wherewith to procure a meal. Upon more closely, though still with great delicacy, questioning the young female, the stranger found all his surmises to be correct; but she could not tell whether the silk dress were injured beyond redemption or not. "In any case," she added, still weeping bitterly, "I shall tell the lady the truth when I take home the dress to-morrow."—These words, uttered with the most unquestionable sincerity, made a deep impression upon the gentleman who was addressing her; for they denoted an unsophisticated uprightness of character which augmented the interest he already felt in the poor young creature.—"And who is the lady you speak of?" he enquired.—"The Dowager Marchioness of Wilmington," was the reply.—"Ah!" ejaculated the stranger: then, after a moment's pause, he said, "Pardon me, young woman, for having asked you so many questions: but it has not been through motives of idle curiosity. Here is a small sum that will procure you immediate necessities;"—and thrusting a coin into her hand, he hurried away. The deed took the poor girl completely by surprise;—for although it has occupied me some time to relate all that passed between her and the generous stranger, yet in reality their dialogue was of scarcely more than two minutes' duration; and the dress-maker had not yet recovered from the grief into which the accident to her parcel had plunged her. When, therefore, the light of the lamp flashed upon a bright yellow coin, she could scarcely believe her eyes:—she fancied that her benefactor had made a mistake, and intended to give her a shilling,—and then, in spite of the cold night, the warm blood rushed to her cheeks, at the idea of any one

treating her as a mendicant—for she had her little feelings of pride, poor though she were! But her next thought was that the stranger might really have intended to present her with a sovereign; and—so strange a sentiment is human pride, even in the most virtuous bosoms—her soul revolted not from receiving that amount. And now, lest this circumstance should induce you to form an evil opinion of my heroine, I must inform you that it was no selfish nor avaricious feeling that made her draw a distinction between the gift of a shilling and that of a sovereign:—but she had been tenderly and genteelly brought up—and the comparison which her mind drew, was simply as between the alms that one would toss to a mendicant, and the pecuniary aid which a delicate benevolence would administer to a person in temporary embarrassment.

"Of all these things she thought as she retraced her way along Oxford Street,—holding her umbrella with her right hand, and with her left arm encircling the parcel more carefully than before. She came to the conclusion that the sovereign was not given by mistake; and she resolved to avail herself of the bounty which Providence itself had appeared to bestow upon her in the hour of her bitterest need. She thought of the little brother who was anxiously expecting her return, and who had fared so scantily for the last few days,—that little brother of only eight years old, whom the sudden, premature, and almost simultaneous death of their parents, about two years previously, had left so completely dependant upon her! As she drew near the street in which she lived, she stopped at the baker's where she was accustomed to deal, and purchased some nice buns;—and then she hurried on until she reached the house wherein she rented a small back room on the third floor. On entering the little chamber, which, though poorly furnished, was very clean and neat, a beautiful boy, with light brown curly hair and fine blue eyes, but with cheeks somewhat pale, sprang towards her, exclaiming "Oh! dear sister Julia, I am so glad you have come back: for I cannot bear to be left alone so long!"—"I have brought you something nice, Harry," said the kind girl, smiling sweetly upon him; and, she placed the bag containing the buns in his hand. Joy sparkled in his eyes;—but in another moment he observed that his sister had brought back the parcel, which she had opened, and was carefully examining the silk-dress to ascertain the amount of injury done to it. Throwing the cakes upon the table, the boy hastened to question her; but poor Julia could not answer him—scalding tears were trickling down her cheeks—a suffocating grief filled her bosom,—for she found, to her dismay, that the dress was completely spoilt!

"She sat down, and gave full vent to her anguish;—and then little Harry threw his arms round her neck, and endeavoured to console her. The flood of tears which she shed, and the affectionate conduct of her little brother at length considerably soothed her;—and the poor girl made up her mind to meet her misfortune with resignation. "You are dripping wet, dear Julia," said Harry: "and there is not a morsel of coal left," he added, looking at the miserable remnant of a fire which was fast extinguishing in the grate.—"Poor boy! you have been cold," exclaimed the dress-maker, not thinking of herself.—"No, dear Julia," he answered; "for I have been walking up and down the room, to keep myself awake till you came back. I was only afraid that the candle would not last."—"Nor will it many minutes longer, Harry"

cried Julia, starting from her seat. 'But do not be afraid, my dear little fellow; for I have plenty of money to buy all we want for the moment. A good kind gentleman took compassion upon me, and—and—' she did not choose to say, 'and gave me some money;'—for, somehow or another, her pure soul revolted from the idea that she had been the object of eleemosynary benevolence on the part of a stranger:—so, cutting the matter short, she kissed her little brother tenderly, bade him eat his cakes, and, promising to return in a few minutes, hurried away. She ordered up coals and wood from the nearest shed,—thence she repaired to the grocer's, where she purchased a few articles,—and lastly, she sped to the baker's, to buy bread. But the moment she entered this shop, the man-ter rushed from behind the counter, seized her rudely, called her by many opprobrious names, and, raising an alarm, attracted the attention of a policeman who was passing by. The constable entered the shop, and enquired the cause of the disturbance; but poor Julia had fainted;—and she, therefore, heard not the charge that was made against her. When she came to her senses, she gazed wildly around, thinking that she had just awoke from a horrid dream;—but, alas! it was all too true! She was seated in a chair in the middle of the shop—a policeman standing near her—and a gaping, curious crowd collected at the door. 'Now, young woman,' said the officer, 'come along with me!'—Julia cast upon him a look so full of horror and amazement, that the man's heart was for an instant touched;—but, being accustomed to endless varieties of imposture on the part of offenders, he speedily recovered the cold indifference so characteristic of his class, and said sternly, if not brutally, 'None of this nonsense: you must tramp off to the station-house!'—'But what have I done? what offence have I committed?' asked Julia, in a tone of the most pathetic entreaty. 'Oh! there must be some dreadful mistake in all this!'—'No mistake at all,' said the officer; 'and you'll know all about it in the morning, when you go before the magistrate!'—'The magistrate!' repeated the girl, with the emphasis of despair. 'But my poor little brother, what will become of him?'—'That's no business of mine,' returned the constable: 'come along!'—and he dragged the half-fainting Julia from the shop.

'Away to the nearest station-house was the unhappy young woman rather borne than conducted;—and so stunned—so stupefied was she by this sudden, unaccountable, and overwhelming misfortune, that her tongue refused to give utterance to the questions which her suspense prompted her lips to frame. The station was close by; and thus was it that before she had leisure to recover from her bewilderment and terror, she found herself thrust into a dark cell—all dripping wet from head to foot as she was. When full consciousness returned, and she was enabled to look her misfortune in the face, she found that all the articles she had purchased at the grocer's and all the remainder of her money were gone. Yet she could not possibly conceive on what charge she had been thus rudely treated;—and her conscience inspired her with the hope that her complete innocence must become apparent in the morning. But the thought of her little brother excited the most painful sensations in her bosom;—her heart was rent with pangs that seemed to threaten her very existence! The poor little fellow!—she fancied she saw him sitting in the cold, lonely chamber, crying bitterly at his sister's pro-

longed absence:—and then a thousand fears haunted her—all distracting in the extreme. Might he not take it into his head to go out to look after her?—he, who was so ignorant of London!—and then might he not be lost in the mazes of the mighty metropolis, and on a night when it would be almost death to him to wander about the flooded streets? Oh! all these fears—these thoughts were terrible;—for she dearly loved her little brother—loved him, perhaps, the more affectionately, the more tenderly, because their orphan condition rendered him so completely dependant upon her,—and because he was so much attached to her, and his ways were so winning—his disposition so cheerful!

'In the midst of these harrowing meditations a policeman opened the trap in the door of the cell, and called her by name—'Julia Murray!' She answered in a faint and feeble tone; and the officer was about to close the trap, satisfied that his prisoner was not ill nor had attempted suicide,—when the young woman suddenly exclaimed, 'Stop one moment!'—'Well, what is it?' demanded the constable.—In a few hurried words Julia explained to him how she had a little brother expecting her return, how he would be overwhelmed with grief at her unaccountable absence, and how grateful she should feel if any one could be sent to inform the child that his sister would be certain to return in the morning. The constable, who was a kind-hearted man, promised that her request should be complied with; and he was about to depart when, a thought striking him, he said, 'But are you so sure, young woman, of getting off so easy as you imagine. The charge is a serious one, mind!'—'The charge!' she repeated: 'I do not even yet know what it is!'—'Oh! that's all gammon,' cried the constable, closing the trap abruptly; and now, his opinion of the prisoner being that she was a hardened impostor, and had some sinister motive in view in sending a message to her lodgings, determined to trouble himself no more concerning the matter. It was, however, some consolation to the poor girl to believe that her commission would be duly executed;—for, though she had heard the officer's unfeeling, cutting observation relative to her ignorance of the accusation against her, she could not for an instant suppose that he would neglect to fulfil his promise regarding her little brother. But wearily—wearily passed away that night—not once did the poor dress-maker close her eyes—and she counted every hour that was proclaimed from the neighbouring church-clock—often saying to herself that never, never had time travelled with such leaden pace before! She had not tasted food for many hours—and yet she was not hungry; but she experienced a terrible faintness at the chest, and an oppressiveness on the brain, that at intervals made her mind wander. Her cloak was dripping wet when she had been locked up, and her shoes, stockings, and the lower part of her dress were saturated;—but she had thrown her cloak aside, and her garments had dried upon her;—and now she felt not positively cold—only a numbness in her limbs, which gave her however no pain.

'At length the dull, misty, wintry morning dawned upon the metropolis—though all was still dark in her gloomy cell. Presently an officer entered, and gave her a cup of hot coffee and a piece of bread. She asked him if the message had been sent to her brother;—but he was not the same constable who had made the round of the cells at midnight, and therefore knew nothing about the matter. More—

over, he was a stern, sulky man; and she dared not speak farther to him—much as she longed to ascertain the real nature of the charge against her. She drank the coffee, which seemed to do her good;—but she could not force a single mouthful of the bread down her throat—though the cravings of hunger now began to oppress her cruelly. But, to use a common phrase, her heart heaved against food. A couple of hours more passed away, and then the same policeman who had arrested her on the preceding evening came to conduct her to the police-office. While they were proceeding thither, Julia enquired the nature of the charge against her; and she now learnt for the first time that the coin which she had changed at the baker's, and which she had believed to be a sovereign, was only a gilt counter, of the kind used at card tables in genteel society. She was cruelly shocked at this information, and frankly and candidly explained to the officer the manner in which she had become possessed of it; but he only shook his head, and seemed to put but little faith in her story. Julia was, however, too much absorbed in the vexation and ignominy she had thus been subjected to, and was still enduring, to notice the man's incredulity;—but she clung to the hope that her tale would be believed by the magistrate before whom she was about to appear. It happened that the usual charges of drunkenness were just disposed of, at the moment when the young female entered the court; and she was accordingly at once placed at the bar—the baker being already in attendance to prefer his charge against her. This he did in a plain and straight-forward manner,—showing no ill-feeling against the prisoner—but, on the contrary, alleging that he had always believed her to be a highly respectable, industrious, and praise-worthy young woman until the present transaction took place. He added that he had given her into custody in a moment of irritation, believing himself to have been duped; and that he should be truly delighted if she could make her innocence apparent. Julia's courage was somewhat restored by the forbearing conduct of the baker—for her own good sense told her that the case was really one involving much unpleasant suspicion;—and she now told her tale with an artlessness and sincerity that produced no inconsiderable effect upon the bench. Nevertheless, as the magistrate observed, it certainly appeared strange that a gentleman should have given her a gilt counter in mistake for a sovereign,—strange also that a mere stranger should have intended to bestow upon her a sovereign at all. The magistrate proceeded to state that the prisoner must be remanded, in order that the gentleman of whom she spoke—if her story were true—might come forward, upon seeing the report of the case in the newspapers, and tender his evidence. Julia burst out into an agony of weeping, when she heard that she must go to prison for a week; and the baker requested the magistrate to re-consider his decision. This appeal was, however, made in vain; but it was intimated that bail would be received for the prisoner's re-appearance. The baker gave a whispered assurance to the unhappy girl that he would get two of his friends to become security for her; and this promise consoled her. When she was removed from the office, on her way to a cell in the rear of the establishment, the baker told her that his wife had taken care of her brother, who had passed the night at their house; and he expressed his deep regret that he should have proceeded against her, as he had learnt from her landlady that she was a young woman of most exemplary character. To be brief, the baker

performed his promise of procuring bail for the prisoner; and at about two o'clock in the afternoon she was enabled to return home.

"Little Harry was speedily brought back to her by the baker's wife, who, it appeared, had bitterly reproached her husband on the preceding evening for his conduct towards Miss Murray, and, with considerate kindness, had at once sent for her brother, whom the good woman consoled with some plausible tale accounting for his sister's absence. Julia was not however happy, even though restored to liberty; for the charge still hung over her—and so much depended on the chance of the appearance of her unknown benefactor, who, she still firmly believed, had accidentally and most unintentionally given her the gilt counter which had led to so much wretchedness and serious embarrassment. Her first care was now, however, to proceed to the house of the old Marchioness of Wilmington, with the silk-dress, which was completely spoiled; and Julia's heart was heavy as she hurried along Oxford Street. The weather was dull and gloomy; but the rain had ceased, and the two streams of people flowed on, in different directions, without the hurry, bustle, and struggling that had prevailed on the preceding evening. Julia's bosom palpitated nervously when she reached the spot where the accident had occurred—that accident to which her present sorrows might be traced. On reaching the house of the marchioness in Hanover Square, the poor girl was conducted into the presence of the dowager—a proud, stately dame whose age exceeded fifty, but who endeavoured by means of rouge, false hair, false teeth, and the appliances of the toilette, to appear at least twenty years younger. Her ladyship was seated in a small, but elegantly furnished parlour, and was occupied in reading—no, in skimming—the last new novel, which, according to the usual fashion, had been carefully spun out into three volumes, though all the incidents it contained might with advantage have been condensed into one. At a beautiful little work-table, sat a lovely creature of two-and-twenty, with hair as dark as jet, fine large black eyes, and a tall symmetrical, but rather robust figure. On this fair young lady's countenance there was a slight shade of melancholy; and her cheeks were somewhat pale—but apparently through a secret care, and not ill-health. This was Lady Caroline Jerningham, the only daughter of the marchioness, and consequently sister to the Marquis of Wilmington, her ladyship's only son.

"On entering the presence of these ladies, Julia, who had previously arranged in her own imagination the precise terms in which she proposed to tell her tale,—with a strict adherence to truth,—forgot all her studied task, and became overwhelmed with confusion. The marchioness looked so stately—so prim—so queen-like in her deportment, not to say positively austere, that the poor girl was seized with vague apprehensions and unknown terrors, as if she had committed a great and grievous fault. Lady Caroline, however, cast upon her a look of such kind encouragement, and also of such significance, that it almost struck Julia at the moment that the young patrician lady had a fore-knowledge of the disaster which had occurred to the dress. Yet how was that possible?—and as the absurdity of such an idea forced itself upon the girl's mind the instant after the idea itself was entertained, her confusion and embarrassment were increased, and she burst into tears. The dowager uttered an ejaculation of surprise: and Julia, hastily wiping her

that she has desired
 as a ratification of the
 hastened from the room :
 opening the envelope, found
 a bank-note for twenty
 pounds were deeply touched
 Lady Octavian's generosity
 and all the more so on account
 manner in which the succour

hastened off again to the Duke of
 his residence ; and when it was dusk,
 she went forth to redeem her wearing ap-
 pears from the pawnbroker's. With very
 different feelings from those which she had
 experienced on the previous evening, was it
 that she now entered the place ; and she re-
 turned with a light heart to the lodging, to
 prepare a comfortable meal against her bro-
 ther's re-appearance. And it was the bread
 of happiness which the twins ate that night—
 scarcely addened by the idea of separation,
 because they felt it was for their mutual good.

But when the morrow came and the hour for
 separation arrived, they wept and renewed
 again and again the farewell embrace ere they
 tore themselves asunder.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BURKER.

THE scene which we are about to describe, oc-
 curred on the same evening as Christina's visit
 to the pawnbroker.

It was between nine and ten o'clock that a
 man of most ill-favoured appearance, emerged
 from one of the low courts opening from the
 New Cut, Lambeth ; and bent his way in
 the direction of the maze of densely popu-
 lated streets and alleys which lie between
 the lower parts of the Waterloo and
 Westminster Roads. This man was about
 forty years of age ; and it would be impossible
 to conceive a human exterior so repulsive, or
 so fearfully calculated to make the blood
 of a beholder curdle in the veins. There are
 some physiognomies which impress one with a
 capacity for particular sorts of mischief ; there
 are features, for instance, which indicate low
 cunning—others denote violent passions—and
 there are others which reveal an instinctive
 thirst for blood. But all the most terrible
 attributes of the human mind were con-
 centrated in the expression of that man's
 countenance. He had a small snub nose,
 which appeared to have been stuck on to his
 face as if it were an afterthought of nature :
 his mouth was large, and was furnished with a
 set of sharp pointed shark-like teeth, which
 being naturally white, and remaining so in
 defiance of neglect, glittered horribly between

his coarse thick lip. His eyes were of the
 dark colour and expression of a reptile's ; and
 the brows, by being traced irregularly—or
 else being brought down by an habitual lower-
 ing regard—added to the shuddering sensation
 produced by a look from those horrible eyes.
 His hair—of a light brown, and already turn-
 ing gray—was completely matted : his whis-
 kers, of a darker colour, were equally ragged
 and unkempt. He was dressed in a loose drab
 upper garment that appeared to be a coach-
 man's great-coat with a portion of the skirts
 cut off. A dirty cotton handkerchief was tied
 negligently about his neck ; and his trousers,
 of a dingy gray, hung loose as if he wore no
 braces. His hands were thrust into the
 pockets on the outer side of the coat, and
 under one arm he held a short stick, which
 however might be more aptly denominated a
 club. From beneath the leathern front of his
 well-worn cap, his locks were hung hastily
 around when he emerged from the court,
 as if his conscience were not altogether so
 clear as to place his personal freedom
 beyond the possibility of inconvenient molesta-
 tion.

Continuing his way, and passing rapidly
 through several streets—evidently with a
 settled purpose in view—he at length relaxed
 his pace near a house in the midst of that
 maze of lanes, alleys, and courts to which we
 have already alluded. It was a house that
 had a small dissenting chapel on one side, and
 a beer-shop on the other ; and it must be
 observed that next to the chapel there was a
 narrow alley with a low arched entrance. The
 house to which we are particularly alluding,
 and which stood between the chapel and the
 beer-shop, was a small one—for it was a poor
 street ; but there was nothing in its exterior
 to detract from its air of humble respectability.
 A small brass-plate on the front door, indicated
 that it was occupied by a person named John
 Smedley, whose calling was that of gold-
 beater. This was farther illustrated by a gilt
 arm, the fist clutching a hammer, which ap-
 peared over the ground-floor window. That
 window had green blinds ; and if a passer-by
 peeped over them, he would look into a little
 parlour that was furnished neatly enough.
 The two windows of the first floor front had
 dark green curtains : for this floor was let to
 a lodger. When unoccupied, a neatly written
 card, containing the intimation of " Lodgings
 to let," would be seen in the lower window :
 but the ticket was not there now, inasmuch-
 as the apartments referred to had a tenant.

Mr. and Mrs. Smedley had the reputation in
 the neighbourhood of being respectable people
 enough,—although whispering rumour declared
 that the wife was somewhat attached to strong
 waters ; but on the other hand, the husband
 was regular in his attendance at the dissenting
 chapel next door,—so that the minister re-
 garded him as one of his " choicest and most

newspaper, that I even dreamt of the mistake—the dreadful mistake I had made: and the instant the case met my eyes, I hurried hither. The explanation which I have to give, you can of course anticipate:—I had purchased some gilt counters only half-an-hour before I met you in Hanover Square, and I put them loose into the same pocket which contained my money.’—‘I never for an instant imagined, sir,’ said Julia, ‘that you had purposely trifled with my feelings.’—‘Generous young woman, to put such a construction upon a matter which has caused you so much suffering!’ exclaimed the unknown. ‘But it is now my duty to accompany you at once to the police-court, and place your character in the same honourable light in which it originally stood.’—Julia was overjoyed at this announcement; and the gentleman, giving her his arm, escorted her to the police-court, calling however on the baker in their way to desire him to attend immediately before the magistrate. During the walk, the stranger asked the young woman a great many questions—not of an impertinent nature, nor denoting an idle curiosity,—but rather evincing an interest in the orphan girl. It however struck Julia as somewhat singular that he did not put a single query to her relative to the spoilt dress: it seemed as if he had quite forgotten that incident!

“On their arrival at the police-office, the gentleman immediately handed his card to the magistrate, to whom he whispered a few words at the same time; and his worship became all civility and politeness. The case was called on without a moment’s delay: the gentleman concisely but effectually explained the affair of the gilt counter; and the magistrate, on declaring Julia to be discharged, assured her that she would leave the court without the slightest stain on her character. The stranger placed ten pounds in the magistrate’s hands for the use of the poor-box, and then departed in company with Julia, whom he escorted back to the house in which she dwelt. On reaching the door, he paused, and taking her hand, said, ‘Miss Murray, I shall not insult you by offering a pecuniary recompense for the mortification, annoyance, and distress you have undergone through that gilt counter. But I shall endeavour to serve you in another way. Farewell for the present: you will shortly see me again; for, be assured,’ he added, gazing earnestly upon her for a moment, ‘I shall never forget you.’—Thus speaking, he pressed her hand and hurried away;—and it was not until he had disappeared from her view that she remembered she was still in profound ignorance of who or what he was. It, however, struck her that the case would be again reported in the newspapers; and she therefore hoped that the morrow would clear up the mystery. But it was with some degree of anxiety and painful suspense that she thus awaited the publication of the journals of the ensuing day;—and she could not account to herself for the feelings that thus agitated her. Although her character had been completely cleared from the imputation thrown upon it, and her innocence was made unquestionably apparent,—although she had ample funds, through the generosity of Lady Caroline Jerningham, to provide for all present wants,—and although a secret voice seemed to whisper in her soul that she possessed a good friend in the stranger-gentleman,—yet, somehow or another, poor Julia was not entirely contented. Was it that the handsome countenance of

her unknown benefactor had made any impression on her heart?—was it that his kind and sympathising conduct had touched a tender chord in her pure and innocent bosom? It is impossible to answer these questions at present: but it is very certain that Julia experienced a disappointment almost amounting to a positive shock, when she found that the morning papers seemed to be in as much ignorance as herself relative to her unknown benefactor. The report merely alluded to him as ‘*a gentleman whose name did not transpire*’;—and this mystery in which her friend evidently wrapped himself, became a source of secret trouble to the young dress-maker. Wherefore had he not revealed his name to her? Disreputable that name could not be; else how could it have produced so magical an effect upon the magistrate? Was it, then, a great—a famous—or a noble name? Julia sighed—and dared not hazard any conjectures: but in her heart there suddenly appeared to arise a hope—a secret wish, that the stranger was *not* so very highly exalted above her own social sphere!

“Again was Julia preparing to sally forth and visit the various ladies for whom she was accustomed to work, when her landlady brought her up a note. It was from Lady Caroline Jerningham, requesting Miss Murray to call upon her in the evening at a stated hour, as her ladyship had a quantity of work to place in her hands. The young maiden was overjoyed at the receipt of this missive, which not only promised her employment, but likewise seemed to be an assurance of the tender interest which the charming Lady Caroline had taken in her. She did not therefore stir out until the evening;—and little Harry was delighted that his sister remained at home with him. But when the appointed hour drew near, she tranquillised her brother with a promise of a speedy return; and away she sped, with a heart full of hope, towards Hanover Square. On reaching the splendid mansion occupied by the Dowager-Marchioness, Julia was received by Lady Caroline’s own maid, and was forthwith conducted to the chamber of her fair patroness, who treated her in the most kind and condescending manner. ‘I regret, Miss Murray,’ she said, ‘that I am forced to admit you thus stealthily into the house; but my mother is of a peculiar temper, although in reality possessed of a good heart.’—‘I understand your ladyship,’ returned Julia: ‘the Marchioness cannot forgive me for what she considers neglect. I am however deeply grateful to your ladyship for thinking otherwise, and for giving me such substantial proofs that you entertain so favourable an opinion.’—‘My dear Miss Murray,’ observed Lady Caroline, ‘I will do any thing I can to serve you; for I can well imagine how grateful must be the sympathy of a friend to one who is acquainted with sorrow!’—These words were uttered with almost a mournful emphasis, as if the fair speaker craved that sympathy and friendship for herself which she proffered to another;—and Julia could not help regarding her with mingled surprise, gratitude, and tender interest. They were alone together—that elegant patrician lady and that beautiful milliner,—the maid having retired; and it appeared as if a species of sisterly feeling suddenly sprang up between them, inspiring them with mutual confidence, and for the time annihilating the barrier that social distinctions had raised up between them in the eyes of the world. Thus was it that when Lady Caroline saw Julia’s looks fixed upon her in so earnest and plaintive a manner she felt herself irre-



listfully urged to respond to that tact yet eloquent proffer of sympathy and affection. 'Ah! my dear Miss Murray,' she said, 'you must not imagine that unhappiness exists only with those who have to toil for their daily bread. Perhaps, indeed, their lot is preferable to that of the rich who have causes of grief;—for you have a constant occupation which allows little leisure for disagreeable reflection; whereas *I* have so much time——'.—Lady Caroline checked herself, turned away, and hastily passed a handkerchief across her face. She had perhaps said more than she intended: for, from speaking of the richer and poorer classes in general terms, she had been carried into personal illustration of the truth of her remarks by pointedly placing herself and Julia in juxtaposition. Miss Murray, though totally devoid of artfulness, was yet endowed with an intellect keen enough to perceive this fact: and she now learnt, then—as indeed she had previously suspected—that Lady Caroline was unhappy. But it was not for her to invite a revelation of the fair patrician's cause of sorrow: she therefore remained silent.

"'Julia,' said her ladyship, suddenly turning towards her again, and taking her hand as she thus

spoke,—'Julia,' she repeated, in an earnest, appealing tone, 'I will be a friend to you; but it may happen that I also shall require the aid and sympathy of a friend——'; and, once more checking herself, she sighed profoundly.—'I would serve you night and day, dear lady!' exclaimed the young milliner, pressing to her lips the hand which still grasped her own.—'I have not read your disposition inaccurately, dearest girl,' responded Lady Caroline: then, assuming a more cheerful tone, she said, 'Be it understood, we are friends! And now you must leave me, as my mother will be enquiring after me.'—Julia received a parcel containing a variety of costly stuffs, which she was to make up into dresses for her fair patroness, and which would furnish her with work for at least a month; and, as she was leaving the room, Lady Caroline said, 'My own maid will call upon you every Saturday evening and bring away whatever you may have finished, until the whole be complete.'—They then separated, Lady Caroline pressing Julia's hand warmly at parting; and the young dressmaker hurried homeward, her heart beating with joy at the kindness which she had experienced and the friendship she had formed. 'After all,' she murmured to herself, as she ascended

the stair-case to her chamber, where little Harry was sitting up to await her return.—‘after all, the adventure of the spoilt dress has proved a service, rather than an injury, to me: and perhaps,’ she added,—but it was her heart, and not her lips, that now spoke,—‘the affair of the gilt counter may likewise bring me good luck!’

“Julia now addressed herself to the work of which she had such profusion; and while she sate plying her needle, with little Harry playing about the room, she often thought of the handsome unknown. Every day, after the frugal dinner, she took her brother out to walk for an hour, that a little exercise and fresh air might benefit them both; and, of an evening, when she laid aside her work, she gave him instruction in many useful branches of education. During the day, too, he learnt his lessons; and never did she suffer him to go out alone into the streets—no, not even on the slightest errand. In fact, this excellent young woman took as much care of her little orphan brother as if she had been his parent, instead of his sister; and it was a charming as well as touching sight to behold them repairing to the parish church on a Sabbath-morning,—each attired with so much neatness, and yet in a plain and unobtrusive manner. Well, three weeks had passed since the interview between Julia and Lady Caroline; and on each Saturday evening her ladyship’s maid called to receive and pay for the work that was finished. The domestic was sure to have some pretty present from her mistress for Julia, and a handsome toy—such as a transparent slate, or puzzle, or a miniature carpenter’s tool-box—for Harry; and the grateful milliner sent back her kindest but most respectful regards to her good patroness. But during those three weeks she had neither seen nor heard any thing of the handsome stranger;—and yet, had he not promised that he would shortly call again? Wherefore should he call? Julia never paused to ask herself that question;—but she did sometimes admit, within the secret recesses of her own heart, that she thought it somewhat unkind he did not fulfil his promise, after the distress she had endured in consequence of the mistake he had made respecting the gilt counter. One day the landlady tapped at Julia’s door; and, on being desired to enter, the good woman informed her that ‘*the gentleman in the cloak*,’ was waiting in the parlour below. A blush instantly spread itself over Julia’s cheeks; whereupon the landlady said in a low but impressive tone, ‘you need not be ashamed of an honest attachment, Miss; and I know you are too good a girl to form any other. In fact, I told the gentleman what an excellent creature you were, and how well you behaved to your little brother.’—‘You told him all *that*?’ exclaimed Julia, looking up in a surprise mingled with secret pleasure, while the blush upon her beauteous countenance deepened.—‘Certainly I did, Miss, replied the landlady: ‘but not to-day. It was when he called on account of that unpleasant little affair, you know; and before he sent me up to fetch you down, he asked no end of questions about you; and he seemed so pleased when I told him that you were such a good, industrious young person, and so kind to your orphan brother; and how you kept yourself so quiet and respectable, having no acquaintances scarcely, and certainly no visitors except your lady-customers or their maids.’—‘But the gentleman did not ask all those questions?’ said

Julia, in a hesitating manner and with a tremulous voice, while her heart palpitated with emotions of unknown pleasure.—‘Indeed he did, Miss,’ returned the landlady. ‘But, dear me! now I think of it, he charged me not to tell you that he had asked any thing at all concerning you: and by the same token, he gave me a sovereign to hold my tongue in this respect; and therefore, Miss, you must not even look as if you knew a syllable of what occurred on that occasion. I am sure he is some great person in disguise; and I am also certain that he has fallen in love with you.’—Julia’s countenance now became scarlet; and she was about to make a remonstrative reply, when little Harry, who began to grow impatient of so much mysterious whispering between his sister and the landlady, approached them, saying, ‘Is any thing the matter, dear Julia?’—‘Nothing, my darling boy,’ was the cheerful reply: ‘I shall return in a few minutes;’—and Julia hastened down stairs, the landlady remaining with Harry.

“Though the young maiden endeavoured to compose herself as much as possible, yet all that the landlady had told her rushed to her mind with renewed force and stronger significance just as she crossed the threshold of the parlour and appeared in the presence of *the gentleman in the cloak*. He observed her confusion—noticed the blush that mantled on her cheeks—and, mistaking the cause said, as he took her hand, ‘I am afraid, Miss Murray, that you consider it indiscreet for me thus to pay my respects to you; and indeed, that fear has prevented me from calling sooner.’—Julia started cast down her eyes, and made no reply; for in her artless innocence, it had never before struck her that, an evil construction might be placed upon the visits of the gentleman: but now the conviction that such was indeed the result to be apprehended, was forced—yes, painfully forced—upon her sensitive mind. The stranger read what was passing in her imagination; and if he were delighted to observe that the danger which he had specified was previously unsuspected by her ingenuous soul, he was not the less gratified to acquire the certainty that her pure thoughts were shocked by the idea of compromising her reputation.—‘Fear not, Miss Murray,’ he continued, again taking her hand; ‘I should be the last person on the face of the earth to do you a wilful injury in any way. I have merely called, as in duty bound, to assure myself that you have perfectly recovered from the effects of the distressing ordeal through which you were compelled to pass in consequence of my carelessness. But innocence, Miss Murray,’ he added, emphatically, ‘will invariably triumph in the long run; and virtue will not ever languish unrewarded. Your exemplary conduct, Miss Murray, must sooner or later be adequately recompensed: your tenderness towards your orphan brother must ensure for you the esteem and respect of all liberal and honest persons. May I request, as a particular favour, that you will presently call on Mr. Richardson, the solicitor, in Berners Street, close by; as I know that he has some tidings, of rather an agreeable character, to impart to you.’—With these words, the stranger pressed the young maiden’s hand, and respectfully took his leave of her.

“Julia hastened back to her own chamber, and related to the worthy, well-meaning, but garrulous landlady, every thing that *the gentleman in the cloak* had said to her. ‘Ah! Miss,’ cried the woman, ‘I

seemed to have a fore-knowledge that something good was to happen to you; and now I am sure of it. But pray make haste and see what the lawyer wants with you.'—Julia did not require to be pressed upon this point: she herself was too anxious to solve this new mystery to permit any unnecessary delay to take place; and, having dressed little Harry in his Sunday apparel, she put on her best bonnet and shawl, and away the sister went with her little brother to the lawyer's. They entered an office in which there were a great many clerks, who all left off writing to turn round and have a look at the pretty young lady—for a lady did Julia really seem, as she actually was by birth, education, and manners;—but when she timidly mentioned her name, she found herself the object of the most respectful attention. The head clerk ushered her and her brother into a handsome apartment, where an elderly gentleman, with a benevolent countenance, was seated at a desk covered with papers; and the reception which he gave Julia Murray was more than courteous—it was cordial and, as it were, paternally kind. 'Sit down, young lady,' he said, handing her to a chair: 'and you, my little fellow, place yourself near your sister. And now, Miss Murray,' he continued, raising his large silver spectacles from his eyes to his forehead, 'I have some good news to communicate to you; and I am sure, after all I have heard of you, I am proud and happy to be the medium of conveying anything agreeable to your ears.'—'You are very kind, sir,' murmured the young maiden, still in the deepest suspense.—'Did you ever hear your late father speak of any one who owed him a sum of money?' enquired the lawyer.—Julia reflected for a few moments, and then replied in the negative.—'Well, perhaps he did not mention his private affairs before you,' observed the lawyer; 'it is nevertheless a fact, that many years ago he advanced a certain sum to a friend who was in difficulties; but these embarrassments continued, ending in bankruptcy or something of the sort; and so your poor father lost the whole amount thus advanced. The friend went abroad; and he has latterly returned to England, a rich man—having retrieved his fortunes in a foreign clime. He made enquiries after your parents, and to his sorrow learnt that they were no more; but he could not succeed in tracing you out. At length he saw a report of a certain case in the newspaper, and ascertained that you were the young lady therein mentioned. His sorrow at the first appearance of the affair was only equalled by his joy when he beheld the result; for he has your interest deeply at heart. He has, however, been compelled to leave London in a great hurry;—but before he went away, he gave me certain instructions, which I have fulfilled with all possible despatch. The sum which he borrowed of your father, with compound interest, amounts to six hundred pounds; and this money I have laid out for you in the purchase of a neat little house, with good, serviceable furniture, in Camden Town. There is an excellent young gentlemen's school close by; and my client has paid a year in advance for Master Harry's tuition. He also intends that you shall be at no expense for the boy's education. Over and above all this, I am instructed to place these fifty pounds in your hands; and if my client has thus done more than his actual liability to your father required, it is simply as a recompense for the long delay which has occurred in refunding a loan

so generously advanced and so vitally necessary to him at the time. Now, my dear young lady, I have no more to say, farther than that this card furnishes the address of your house, of which I likewise present you the key; and may this little gleam of good fortune encourage you to pursue the course which has hitherto won for you so much esteem, and which may yet lead you to the highest pinnacle of happiness and prosperity.'—With these words, the kind-hearted man shook Julia warmly by the hand; the young maiden endeavoured to express her heart-felt gratitude for the unexpected benefits thus showered upon her: but tears—tears of happiness flowed down her cheeks—and her bosom was so full of strange and conflicting emotions, that her powers of utterance were suspended. Even as she took up the bank notes, the key, and the card, and thrust them all together into her little silk bag, her hands trembled so that she could scarcely perform those simple acts; and when in a few minutes she found herself walking along the street, with little Harry by her side, she could not remember leaving the lawyer's office. She fancied that she had been giving way to some wild hallucination—some absurd delusion of the brain: but when she felt in her bag, there were the proofs of the reality!

"It was no easy task to make little Harry comprehend the altered nature of their circumstances. He could not conceive how his sister had possibly obtained a house of her own, and fancied that she was joking with him; for he had not been able to understand very much of what the lawyer had said to Julia. However, all doubts on the boy's part vanished, when he heard his sister explain to their landlady every thing that had taken place at Mr. Richardson's, and conclude by requesting that good woman to accompany her forthwith to Camden Town. This desire was complied with; and away they all three went in a cab to the address designated upon the card. In due time the vehicle drew up opposite a neat house forming one of a terrace recently built; and the little party entered the dwelling with the least possible delay. It was all new from top to bottom,—the furniture, which was substantial and good, was new likewise;—the hangings to the windows and the carpets had been selected with admirable taste in reference to the colour and pattern of the paper on the walls:—in fact, the abode was fitted up in the most comfortable manner! 'I congratulate you, my dear Miss Murray,' exclaimed her companion; 'and I am sure I am as delighted as yourself, although I shall lose you as a lodger. But you do not, then, think that it was *the gentleman in the cloak* who has done all this?'—'No,' answered Julia; 'that cannot be, because I am sure the gentleman you speak of never knew my father; and moreover the kind friend who has thus handsomely repaid the money my father lent him, has gone out of town.'—'Then how came *the gentleman in the cloak* to call and tell you, Miss, that the lawyer wished to see you?'—'Ah! I never thought of that!' exclaimed Julia. 'And yet,' she added, after a few moments' serious reflection, 'Mr. Richardson said that my father's debtor had found me out through the medium of the newspaper report; and this circumstance may have brought him and *the gentleman in the cloak* together.'—'True!' ejaculated the garrulous woman. 'Oh! what a sweet place this is, to be sure!'—'It is too good for me,' said Julia, in a mournful tone.

the first feelings of delight now yielding to sober reflection: 'the occupant of such a house as this requires a servant, and should possess a certain income; whereas I cannot afford the former, not possessing the latter.'—'Oh! Miss, are you blind to all the advantages now spread before your eyes?' demanded the woman. 'Here you are in your own house, rent free, and with fifty pounds in your pocket—Harry's schooling to be paid into the bargain! All your kind patronesses will give you as much work as you can possibly manage, now that they will see how you are getting on in the world; and the number of your customers must increase. Then you can have the assistance of one or two respectable young girls; and you will not only obtain a good living, but be able to save money.'—Julia saw the truth of these observations; and her heart was relieved from a heavy load.—'Besides,' said the talkative but well-meaning woman, 'it would seem like flying in the face of Providence not to be thankful for such bounties.'—'Yes,' ejaculated Julia, touched more profoundly by this remark than by the worldly reasoning previously advanced by her companion: 'I do sincerely and firmly believe that HE, who watches all our ways and knows all our steps, has taken compassion upon me and my darling brother; and I receive in thankfulness the blessings thus showered upon me!'—Thus speaking, the young maiden turned aside for a few moments; and heart-felt though short was the prayer which she breathed in silence to the Almighty Ruler of the Universe!

"On the following day Julia and her little brother removed to their new house. It would be vain to attempt to describe the joy and delight experienced by little Harry at this change, the more so inasmuch as there was a large piece of ground attached to the back part of the dwelling, where he could play when the weather was fine. Through the agency of her late landlady, a poor widow-woman, of middle age, steady habits, and great respectability, was recommended to Julia as servant or housekeeper; and thus commenced the economy of the little household. Julia's first care was to address a note to all her kind patronesses to acquaint them with her removal; and Lady Caroline Jerningham was not forgotten. Harry commenced his attendance at the neighbouring school, the master of which called upon Miss Murray and informed her that he had received from Mr. Richardson a year's payment in advance for the boy's tuition; and the preceptor being a kind, worthy man, Harry soon became a great favourite with him. Several weeks passed away; and it was astonishing how Julia's business increased. Carriages were constantly stopping at her door, the number of her patronesses rapidly augmenting; and, on enquiry, she usually found that the new recommendations emanated from Lady Caroline, who appeared, by these results, to be constantly thinking of her friend, the young milliner. In fact, Julia had so much work upon her hands that she was compelled to give a great portion out to respectable needle-women in the neighbourhood; for she preferred this mode of fulfilling her engagements, rather than by taking assistants into the house.

"Four months had thus passed away; and during this interval Julia had never once seen the gentleman in the cloak; nor had she received a visit from her father's debtor, to whose honesty and generosity she

owed so much. She called once upon Mr. Richardson to express a hope that the individual thus alluded to would give her an opportunity of thanking him personally; but the lawyer assured her and, as she thought, somewhat abruptly, that he had left the country on a long voyage; and she returned home, much vexed at the tidings she had received. One evening—it was a Saturday evening, and at about nine o'clock—a cab stopped at the door, and a double-knock immediately announced some visitor. It happened that the housekeeper was absent on a visit of two or three days to some relations in the country—the girl who had been temporarily hired to do her work, and who did not sleep in the house, had gone for the night—and Harry was in bed in his own little room adjoining his sister's bed-chamber up-stairs. Julia was accordingly compelled to answer the door herself; and her surprise was only equalled by her delight, when she found that her visitress was Lady Caroline Jerningham, who had arrived thus mysteriously in a common street-cab, which she had dismissed on alighting at her young friend's house. Miss Murray received her with the most sincere manifestations of joy, and conducted her into the parlour, where a cheerful fire was burning in the grate; for though it was now the month of April, yet the evenings had not entirely lost the chill of winter. You must remember that Julia had not seen Lady Caroline since that evening when the latter sent for her to the mansion in Hanover Square, and on which occasion they had exchanged vows of friendship. Nearly five months had passed since that date; and it struck Julia, as the light of the candles flashed upon the fair patrician's countenance, that she was much altered. Her face was pale and care-worn; and her eyes beamed not with their wonted fires. 'My dear Julia,' she said, seating herself near the fire, 'I had intended to call upon you long ago; but I have been ill and suffering in mind and body. However,' she added, hastily, 'I have never once forgotten you; and I am delighted to find that your business has prospered so well.'—'I am under obligations to your ladyship which I can never repay,' exclaimed Julia, taking the patrician's hand, and conveying it to her lips.—'Do not address me in that formal style, Julia,' said Lady Caroline. 'My God!' she cried, bitterly, 'would that I were not of noble birth: would that I were a daughter of toil; for then I should not have the thousand Argus-eyes of the world upon me!'—and she clasped her hands in a manner indicative of deep mental anguish.—'Dearest Lady Caroline,' exclaimed Julia, 'what ails you? Oh! tell me, and show me how I may minister to you in your sufferings!'—'You once assured me, Julia, that you would serve me by day and by night,' said Lady Caroline, speaking in a low and almost hollow tone, and casting anxious glances around as if she were afraid of being overheard.—'Yes, dearest lady,' returned Julia, emphatically; 'and I renew that pledge! By day and by night can you command me.'—'Are we in danger of intrusion?' demanded Lady Caroline anxiously.—'Not in the least, dear lady: excepting my little brother, who is asleep in his own chamber, we are alone in the house.'—'Heaven be thanked!' ejaculated Caroline Jerningham, speaking as if at least some portion of the heavy weight that lay upon her heart, were removed by this assurance.—'My generous friend,' said Julia, 'I see that you have a terrible but secret cause of grief: make me

your confidant, I implore you! If I can aid you, I shall rejoice indeed to have the opportunity of proving my gratitude for all the kindness I have received at your hands; and if I cannot assist, I may at least be able to console you!—'Dearest Julia, I do indeed require a friend at this moment; for surely never was wretched woman in such dreadful embarrassment as myself! For the last few weeks I have lived only like one distracted—keeping my chamber, and affecting an illness, though steadily refusing to receive the advice of the family physician! And now, fortunately my mother has gone on a visit for a few days to some friends in the country; and my own maid is in my confidence and is trustworthy. Thus my absence from home will not be suspected; and in this is now my only hope! O Julia, Julia—can you not understand my meaning?—then, casting herself at the feet of the young milliner, the almost heart-broken Lady Caroline exclaimed, in the wildest paroxysm of bitter, bitter grief, as she joined her hands imploringly, 'Save my honour, Julia—save my reputation,—and by so doing you save my life: for I would perish by my own hand rather than endure exposure!'—'My God! dearest lady, what do you mean?' demanded Julia, fearful lest her friend's senses were leaving her, and that she was uttering meaningless phrases in the incipient aberration of the intellect: 'tell me, how can I save you in any way? for you know that you may depend upon me to the utmost!'—'How can you save me!' repeated the agonising young lady, in a voice of the most plaintive appeal: 'Oh! do you not comprehend my condition, Julia? And yet I am about to become a mother!'

"These words fell with stupefying, astounding effect upon the ears of Julia Murray: indeed, she could scarcely believe that she had rightly interpreted their meaning. The unhappy Caroline mistook the cause of the young milliner's silence and amazement; and, rising from her suppliant posture, she exclaimed, while the proud patrician blood rushed to her cheeks, 'I understand you, Miss: you are shocked at the announcement I have made, and you are indignant that I should apply to you to screen me. I will drag myself away from your house, therefore; imploring you only to keep the secret which I have been so foolish, so inconsiderate to reveal to you.'—'Just heaven! what do I hear? reproaches from your lips!' cried Julia; and embracing the unhappy lady with sisterly warmth, she said, 'No, no: you have misunderstood me! Grief and surprise for a moment sealed my lips: but you find me ready to succour you, dearest benefactress, to the utmost of my power!'—'Thank you, kind friend,' murmured Lady Caroline, falling back exhausted into her seat; for the agitated state of her feelings, and the harrowing emotions which the dread of Julia's coldness had just caused her to experience, produced effects of a most perilous nature. The young milliner knew not how to act: she was bewildered; and, wringing her hands, exclaimed, 'Oh! what shall I do? how can I aid her?'—Lady Caroline partially recovered her presence of mind as these words fell upon her ears; and giving a few hasty instructions, these were instantly obeyed. Julia conducted, or rather supported her to her own bed-chamber; and then, throwing on her bonnet and shawl, hurried away to fetch the nearest surgeon. The medical man whom she sought was

at home; and he accompanied the milliner to the house, where he arrived just at the moment that his services were required. In a word, Lady Caroline Jerningham that night became the mother of a fine boy, although the birth was premature by nearly a month, and she had risked much by the necessity of adopting the indispensable means in regard to dress to conceal her situation for many weeks past.

"The surgeon, who had every reason to be satisfied with the liberality of Julia on behalf of her unhappy friend, and who was moreover a discreet man, perceived that his patient was a young lady of superior grade in society, and therefore volunteered his aid in ensuring the concealment of the affair. In fact, he stated that he was acquainted with a poor woman in the neighbourhood, who, having just lost her own infant, would be delighted to take charge of the newly-born babe. Lady Caroline was so far recovered as to be able to take part in this conference; and, without suffering the slightest hint to transpire as to who she was, she nevertheless intimated her readiness and ability to remunerate in the most liberal manner those who might be instrumental in completing the arrangement suggested. The surgeon accordingly undertook the settlement of the business; and, after an hour's absence, he returned, accompanied by a young, good-looking, healthy woman, who was willing to embrace the proposal that had been made to her. She was married to a labouring man; her name was Porter; and she lived at the distance of about half a mile from Julia's house. Lady Caroline had a well-filled purse; but even if the contrary had been the case, her friend the milliner could have supplied the funds required. As it was, the young mother gave Mrs. Porter twenty pounds in advance; and having mentioned a feigned name and address, when questioned on that point, Lady Caroline parted with her babe—though not without many a bitter pang and a torrent of heart-wrung tears!

"That was a wretched night for poor Julia Murray. In the warmth of her gratitude and friendship, she had become an accomplice in what she fancied, when she had leisure for sober reflection, to be something bordering upon the nature of a crime. Her pure soul shrank from the idea of the unnatural abandonment by a mother of her child to the mercy of a stranger, rendered necessary even though the proceeding were by the peculiar circumstances in which that mother was placed. Moreover, the readiness with which Lady Caroline had given a false name and address had somewhat shocked the truth-loving Julia;—and then she feared lest the whole matter should by any possibility become known, and compromise her own reputation. All these thoughts and apprehensions swept across her mind, after the surgeon and Mrs. Porter had taken their departure, and while Lady Caroline slept. But the generous girl strove to banish from her mind reflections which tended to diminish her respect for the patrician lady who had manifested so much kindness towards her: moreover, the natural feelings of a woman towards one of her own sex placed in such interesting though embarrassing, not to say *alarming* circumstances,—the sentiments of commiseration, deep sympathy, and tender friendship, soon triumphed over all other considerations;—and when Caroline awoke, just as the grey dawn of morning was breaking into the chamber, she found the young milliner watching by

her bedside. The suffering lady was considerably refreshed and strengthened by the long sleep she had enjoyed: her mind was moreover relieved from the most excruciating anxieties:—and she poured forth her gratitude to Julia Murray in the most sincere and heartfelt manner. Then, in the fulness of the tender confidence which had arisen between them, Caroline told her friend how she had loved her cousin, a young lieutenant in the Navy,—how their union was forbidden by her proud mother, though assented to by her generous brother, the Marquis of Wilmington,—how her mother had used her interest privately to get the young man appointed to a ship and sent to sea with only a few days' warning,—and how, in the anguish of parting, she—Lady Caroline—had fallen a victim to her fatal passion! This narrative moved Julia to tears;—for the young milliner now comprehended what love was—and she felt that she also loved,—and that when she sorrowed in secret at the protracted absence of the stranger who had given her the gilt counter, it was in consequence of the impression which he had made upon her heart! Thus did Julia Murray at length obtain the reading of the mysterious sensations that stirred within her own soul.

"Fortunately there was a means of egress from little Harry's room, without the necessity of the boy's passing through his sister's chamber; and thus was the presence of Lady Caroline retained a profound secret from him. You must also recollect that the incidents just related occurred on the Saturday night; and Harry had by chance received an invitation to pass the Sunday with his schoolmaster's family. Every circumstance thus appeared to favour the complete concealment of Lady Caroline's confinement. But it was now necessary that Julia should repair to the mansion in Hanover Square, and acquaint the young lady's confidential maid with the event which had taken place, as well as to arrange for Caroline's unobserved return home on the Monday evening;—for though at the risk of her life, she was resolved to remain away no longer than the time specified. This commission Julia faithfully performed; and after an absence of upwards of two hours, she reached her own abode once more. The patient was improving rapidly; and when the surgeon called a second time on that Sunday, he was astonished to find her so strong and in the possession of so much physical and moral energy. To be brief, on the Monday evening, according to agreement, Lady Caroline, well wrapped up, disguised in the attire of a daughter of the middle class, and with a dark green veil drawn carefully over her countenance, accompanied Julia in a hackney-coach to Hanover Square; and the two were admitted into the mansion, the hall-porter believing his young mistress to be a friend and equal of the milliner. In this manner they reached Caroline's own chamber without the truth being for an instant suspected; and the confidential maid was in readiness to receive her lady. Julia remained there until the maid had ascertained that the hall-porter had been relieved by another domestic during the supper-hour; and then the milliner took her departure, accompanied by the fervent gratitude and blessings of the fair patrician whom she had thus extricated from a maze of the most frightful difficulties.

"The very next morning, while Julia was seated at work in her parlour, reflecting upon the incidents

of the three preceding days, she heard the iron gate in front of the house groan upon its hinges; and, looking up, she beheld from the window the tall, handsome gentleman approaching the door. The day was fine; and he no longer wore his cloak;—and his garb was plain, unpretending, and perfectly genteel. The housekeeper having returned home that same morning, Julia awaited with a beating heart in the parlour the presence of her visitor; and when he entered, she felt so confused—for a variety of reasons—that she could not utter a word. In the first place she knew that she loved him;—secondly she remembered all the enquiries he had put to her late landlady concerning her;—and thirdly, she recalled to mind the gentle, good, and almost paternal way in which he had addressed her when last they met; and she fancied that in her conduct respecting Lady Caroline she had deviated somewhat from the strict line of integrity, truth, and virtue for pursuing which he had so emphatically commended her, and in which he had with equal earnestness enjoined her to persevere. Taking her hand, he said, 'Miss Murray, have you completely forgotten me?'—'Oh! no, sir,' she cried, with a start as if at an imputation of ingratitude: 'that were impossible!'—'And yet why should you remember me?' he asked, gazing intently upon her 'have I ever done you any service that deserves a thought? The only incident which is likely to dwell in your mind respecting me, is the wretchedness and embarrassment to which my thoughtless conduct exposed you. But for all that you then endured, have I ever made you the slightest recompense?'—'Oh! sir,' cried Julia, the blood rushing to her cheeks, 'do you think for a moment that I ever sought or looked for a pecuniary indemnification? Heavens, how have you mistaken my character!'—and she burst into tears. The stranger gazed upon her, and even smiled as if in satisfaction but he said nothing.—'No, sir,' resumed the young milliner, hastily passing her handkerchief across her countenance and wiping away the traces of her grief; 'I am not a mercenary person, such as you appear to suppose me. I *did* remember you *with gratitude*,' she continued, her voice becoming mournful and plaintive in spite of herself; 'because you spoke kindly to me on that evening when the accident occurred to the silk dress—because you proffered me assistance at a moment when I and my little brother really needed it—because I always believed and still believe that it was on your part entirely an error which led me into such a serious difficulty—because you *then* told me that you would not insult me by offering me any pecuniary recompense—and because, when you called again, you spoke kindly to me as before, gave me good advice, and also brought me intelligence from Mr. Richardson, which has led to my present prosperity. For all these reasons, sir,' she added emphatically, 'I have thought of you often and often; and I considered myself to be deeply your debtor.'—'Excellent girl!' exclaimed the gentleman, surveying her with mingled admiration and interest: 'not for worlds would I insult your feelings, nor wound your generous heart! And it was precisely through delicacy in those respects, that I never did openly proffer you any pecuniary assistance, since that one unfortunate occasion in Hanover Square. Again, let me observe, that if I have not visited you for

four long months, I have not been unmindful of your welfare. I have, as it were, watched over you from a distance; and I have learnt with supreme satisfaction, that your conduct has continued most exemplary. Miss Murray, I am perhaps singular and eccentric in my notions; and, though highly placed in the social sphere, yet I have determined to consult only my own happiness, at least for the future, in the most important step which a man can adopt in life. I allude to marriage.'—Julia started, blushed, and cast down her eyes; and this confusion on her part seemed to encourage her visitor to proceed.—'I must candidly inform you,' he resumed, 'that I have been a husband already, and that the alliance which I formed almost in my boyhood, and in obedience to the dictates of an imperious mother, was an unhappy one. My wife was a heartless coquette—vain—frivolous—and possessing no mind. I sought by gentleness and kindness to render her attached to her home, although I never really loved her; but all was useless. At last she caught a severe cold when returning from a rout, early on a winter's morning; and a rapid decline soon carried her to the tomb. This occurred two years ago. I then vowed that if I should ever contract a second union, it must be where the heart alone was interested. This resolve I declared to my mother; and it has in a measure, I regret to say it, incensed her against me. The very first time I ever saw you, I felt myself suddenly and mysteriously attracted towards you. All that I have since heard or seen of you has tended to confirm that favourable impression; and I am come this morning to offer you my hand, as you already possess my heart.'

'A faintness—an indescribable sensation of mingled joy and apprehension came over Julia, as these last words met her ears,—joy in the hope that she had heard aright, apprehension lest she were the prey of a delightful vision which was too soon to be dissipated. But when she felt her hand pressed to the lips of that handsome suitor who now knelt at her feet, and listened to the tender assurances of an honourable and lasting affection which he breathed with manly sincerity in her ears, she exclaimed, under the sudden impulse of her heart's emotions, 'Is it possible that so much happiness can be in store for me?'—Her suitor received those words as an assent to his proposal; and, pressing the young maiden to his bosom, he said, 'Then without knowing my name you have loved me, dearest Julia?'—She murmured an affirmative; and a rapid interchange of questions and replies convinced him that the young maiden had all along remembered him not *with gratitude, but with affection*! Thereupon, seating himself by her side, and retaining her pretty hand in his he said, 'Then henceforth, Julia, there need exist no mystery on my part. I am the pretended debtor to your deceased father; and Mr. Richardson, my own attorney, followed my secret instructions in providing for yourself and your brother. My object was to place you in comfort, yet still leave you in a condition that rendered you to a certain degree dependant on your own honest industry; and I have been overjoyed to find that prosperity has not induced you to relax your energies, nor led you into extravagances, nor in any way proved injurious to your fair fame, your amiable disposition, and your steady perseverance. With delight, then, shall I accompany so worthy a woman to the altar; and with pride shall I present you to

the world as the Marchioness of Wilmington!'—'Oh! my lord,' murmured Julia, a greater faintness than before now coming over her, as the lofty rank of her suitor was thus announced to her, 'is it possible that you can be the brother of that young lady to whom I owe so much?'—and then she blushed deeply, and a cold shudder passed over her frame as she remembered what a tremendous secret she had retained in her bosom, and must retain inviolably concerning the sister of him who offered to make her the partner of his rank and fortune.—'Yes,' said the marquis, attributing her emotions to the happiness as well as the maidenly confusion which it was natural for her to experience under existing circumstances; 'that Lady Caroline whom you know, is my sister. You may judge my surprise when, on the night that I first encountered you in Hanover Square, you informed me that the spoiled dress was my mother's. The very next morning I called at her residence and privately acquainted Caroline with the little adventure, casually saying that I had been a witness of the accident which was occasioned through no neglect nor carelessness on your part, and desiring her when you presented yourself to mitigate as much as possible my mother's certain resentment against you. Since that period my sister has frequently spoken to me concerning you, and has recommended you extensively to her numerous fashionable acquaintances. But, much as I love and would trust Lady Caroline, I have never informed her of the attachment I experienced for you, nor of the fact that I was your father's pretended debtor. This reserve originated merely in the determination to watch your conduct,—I may tell you all this now, dear girl,—from a distance, so that time might decide whether I should lay my coronet at your feet, or renounce all farther idea of an alliance with you. Thank heaven! the former is the happy destiny; and now I have explained all that may have seemed strange or mysterious in your estimation.'

'Julia could scarcely find words to express her gratitude for all the delicate attentions and generous acts of which the nobleman had thus been the hitherto unknown author: but he sealed her lips with a fond kiss, and then proceeded to address her in the following manner:—'I propose, dearest girl, that our union shall take place in six months from the present time. The reason that I suggest so long a delay is that I may visit you occasionally, in company with my sister, be it understood, so that you may learn to know me better than you now do; and as I shall at once make a confidant of Caroline, and am well acquainted with the generosity of her disposition, you need not apprehend any coolness or hostility on her part. Quite the contrary: she will love you as a sister. Ah! I observe that you sigh and experience an agitation of feeling, my Julia; but you have no cause to dread any exhibition of foolish pride with Caroline. Relative to my mother, I say nothing—promise nothing: at the same time I cannot permit her will to rule my happiness. And now I shall take my leave of you for the present, Julia, and I shall at once hasten to Hanover Square, to confide all that has occurred between us to my sister, who, I regret to state, has been confined for some days past to her own chamber. Alas! she, poor girl, has suffered in her best and holiest affections through her mother's pride; but I rejoice to say that happiness awaits her yet. By the sudden death of a young cousin, Lieutenant Quentin has become

Lord Hartley, and his ship will return in a few months to England. This most unexpected succession to title and wealth, will smooth down all the difficulties which my mother has hitherto interposed in the way of her daughter's happiness; and who knows, Julia,' added the marquis, smiling, 'but that the two marriages may be celebrated at the same time?'—'God grant that they may!' exclaimed the young milliner, with a strange emphasis; then, immediately afterwards she observed, 'For, believe me, I have your sister's happiness most sincerely at heart.'—'I shall not fail to tell Caroline all you say,' returned the marquis; 'and she will be prepared to love you the more tenderly. And now, dear Julia,' he added, rising to depart, 'I must bid you farewell for the present. The next time I call I shall give you due notice beforehand, so that you may have little Harry here to see me. But permit me, before I depart, to request you to divest yourself by degrees of the business and occupations which have accumulated upon you. To speak plainly, you need receive no more work from any person; and you will permit my solicitor, Mr. Richardson, to supply you monthly with such sums as you may require for your expenditure.'—All this was said by Lord Wilmington in so delicate yet tender a manner, that it increased Julia's attachment to him, as well as her high esteem of his character; and they parted, more than ever pleased with each other.

"In the afternoon, Julia was sitting at her work, pondering upon all that had occurred, and scarcely able yet to convince herself that she was not a prey to some delusive vision, when Lady Caroline's maid called with a note from her mistress. In this *billet* the fair patrician said, '*My brother has told me all, dearest Julia; and believe me when I assure you, that it will afford me unfeigned delight to hail you as a sister. Never, never can I forget all your goodness towards me in the hour of my bitter extremity. But, for heaven's sake guard well my secret! This injunction, however, I need scarcely give you. And yet, there is one thing which now affects me; this is—shall you not blush to acknowledge me as your sister-in-law, since you are acquainted with my disgrace? My heart tells me that you commiserate and sympathize: but my fears—Oh! until I receive from you an assurance that may calm them—those fears are truly painful!*'—The generous Julia hastened to pen a reply, conveying in the tenderest terms the assurance solicited; and, having ascertained that the young lady was progressing rapidly towards complete convalescence, she dismissed the maid with the letter entrusted to her. Three weeks, however, elapsed before Lady Caroline was sufficiently recovered to call upon her friend Julia; and then she came alone—for her mother's heart yearned to visit her child. Under the influence of this feeling, she was moved to tears when she learnt that every alternate day Miss Murray had made it a point to call at Mrs. Porter's residence and assure herself that the poor babe was duly cared for. 'This is another proof of your goodness, Julia!' exclaimed Lady Caroline, falling upon her friend's neck and weeping with mingled gratitude and joy. They presently proceeded together to the good woman's abode; and the young mother was charmed to find her child thriving to her heart's best satisfaction. On the following day Lady Caroline revisited Julia; but this time it was in company with her brother the Marquis;—and little Harry was at home to see them. You may

suppose that the party was a happy one; and it gave the nobleman ineffable delight to observe that his sister and his intended wife were on the best possible terms with each other. But he little suspected the tremendous secret that had thus cemented their friendship;—and it cost poor Julia many a pang when she reflected that she was compelled to retain any secret at all from the knowledge of the generous man who reposed such confidence in her! There was however no help for it;—and yet Julia felt as if she were acting with blamable duplicity in veiling a circumstance which for her friend's sake, she would nevertheless rather die than reveal: and after her noble visitors had taken their departure, she did not experience that amount of happiness which, with her present brilliant prospects, she knew she ought to enjoy.

"I must not dwell upon this portion of my narrative. Let us suppose five months to have passed away; during which period the marquis had been constant in his visits to Julia, but always in the company of his sister. So delicate was his behaviour in respect to the reputation of his intended bride, that he avoided every chance of compromising her; and although the neighbours saw a gentleman, whose name they did not know, call three times a-week upon the beautiful milliner, they never beheld him repair thither alone. Thus there was no scope for scandal; and Julia's conduct was always so circumspect as to prove a complete antidote to calumny. I should observe that during the five months mentioned, the attachment subsisting between the pair increased, and warmed into the most ardent love; and I must not forget to state that Lady Caroline visited her child at Mrs. Porter's house as frequently as she was able. But Julia seldom failed to call there every alternate day; and thus the rearing of the poor infant was strictly watched by its mother, and that mother's bosom friend. Sometimes Harry accompanied his sister in her walk to Mrs. Porter's cottage; but the little fellow was always made to wait in one room while Julia was shown the baby in another—and thus the real motive of her visits there was unsuspected by him. Not that she feared he would reveal any thing which he was enjoined to keep secret; but Julia believed—and rightly believed—that it was alike more prudent and delicate to leave him in total ignorance of the object which took her to the cottage. Thus time wore on, as I have already mentioned; and now I must remark that in compliance with the wishes of Lord Wilmington, Julia had by this time altogether ceased to receive work; but instead of drawing on the funds placed at her disposal in the hands of Mr. Richardson, she subsisted upon the savings which she had been enabled to accumulate. I mention all these little circumstances, to afford you as good an idea as I can convey of the excellence of her disposition, and the total absence of selfishness from her character. In fact, the more the marquis saw of her, the more enamoured of her did he become, and the greater grew his admiration of her amiable qualities. It was therefore with joy the most unfeigned that he at length considered himself justified in fixing the day for the bridal; and this ceremony was settled to take place precisely on the completion of the six months from the hour in which he had offered her his hand.

"While Julia was occupied in preparing her own wedding-dress, the Marquis busied himself in render-



ing his splendid mansion in Belgrave Square as suitable as possible for the reception of his bride. In the meantime he had communicated to the Dowager-Marchioness his intended marriage; but, as he had feared, his design experienced the most decided disapproval on her part. Vainly did he reason with her on the subject—uselessly did he represent that his happiness was seriously involved: his mother refused to listen to him;—and he had the mortification to incur her most serious displeasure. The bitterness of her hostility to the match he however concealed from Julia; and, much as he deplored the breach which now existed between himself and his only surviving parent, not for a moment did he entertain the thought of yielding to her tyranny. Thus the time passed on; and it was now within three days of the one fixed for the bridal ceremony, when an incident occurred which produced a terrible change in the aspect of affairs.

"It was a fine summer morning, and the clock was striking eight just as Julia and little Harry were sitting down to breakfast, when the old housekeeper entered to inform her mistress that a woman by the name of Porter desired to speak to her without delay;—for you must remember that the housekeeper was entirely ignorant of the transaction which so nearly

concerned Lady Caroline Jerningham, and to some extent involved Miss Murray, at least as an accessory, in the mysterious business. Mrs. Porter was instantly admitted into the parlour; and when she appeared, and the housekeeper had retired, Julia approached her in an agitated manner and with an enquiring look,—for it struck her that this visit—the first which the woman had ever paid to the house since that night when the infant was entrusted to her—augured something unpleasant. In her excitement she forgot the presence of her brother Harry—whom the woman herself likewise overlooked; and, to the anxious glance darted upon her, Mrs. Porter verbally replied by exclaiming, 'Oh! Miss, the dear child has been suddenly taken dangerously ill!'—'The child dangerously ill!' repeated Julia, who had learned to love the infant almost as much as if it were her own: 'I will accompany you directly;' and, hurrying from the room, she presently reappeared with her bonnet and shawl. Then, noticing Harry, it flashed to her mind that he had overheard what had been said; but a second thought told her that more harm would be done by attempting to explain away any impression that might have been made upon his mind, than by leaving the matter as it then stood;—and, having merely observed

to him that she should return shortly, Julia hastened away in company with Mrs. Porter. Harry said little of his breakfast, not thinking much of the first world which had caught his ear, but which he could not rightly understand; and as it was holiday-time, he was about to repair to play in the garden at the back of the house, when a double knock at the front door made him hasten to the window. Perceiving that the visitor was the Marquis, he ran to give him admittance; and the nobleman entered the parlour. 'Where is your sister, Harry?' he asked, caressing the boy in a kind manner. 'She is gone out, my lord,' was the reply. 'Thus early!' exclaimed the Marquis; 'and I had promised myself the pleasure of breakfasting with you both. The morning was so fine, and as I am a very early riser, I rode out as far as the turnpike, and have sent my horse back with the groom.'—The nobleman spoke thus rather in a musing tone, than actually addressing himself to the boy; and, after a pause, he observed, 'I suppose your sister will not be long?'—'I do not know, my lord,' answered Harry. 'A woman came just as we were sitting down to breakfast, and Julia seemed much vexed at what she told her.'—'I hope that nothing disagreeable has occurred?' cried the Marquis, in a tone of alarm. 'The woman, whose name is Porter, informed Julia that the child was dangerously ill,' responded Harry; 'and then they went away together.'—'Oh! I understand,' said the Marquis; 'the child of some poor woman named Porter is unwell, and your sister has gone to see it.'—'No, my lord, I don't think the child is Mrs. Porter's,' returned Harry, ingenuously, and with boyish communicativeness; 'for I have often called at her cottage with Julia, and I have heard Mr. Porter say that his wife's own baby died last winter.'—'And Julia has often called there?' exclaimed the Marquis, a horrible suspicion suddenly arising in his mind. 'Very often indeed,' answered Harry, totally unconscious of the tremendous amount of mischief he was occasioning. 'When we have been out walking together, we have come round that way, and stopped at the cottage; and then I have waited in the kitchen with Mr. Porter, who used to give me cakes or marbles, while Julia went up stairs with Mrs. Porter.'—'And did you ever see the child?' asked the nobleman, assuming as much composure as he could possibly call to his aid. 'No; Julia never told me a word about it.'—'And how did you first hear of it?'—'Just now, when Mrs. Porter rushed in and said that the child was ill.'—'And was Julia very, very sorry?' demanded the Marquis. 'Oh! yes, indeed!' cried the boy, who saw nothing strange nor unusual in the nobleman's tone or manner, and regarded this dialogue as mere chit-chat. 'And whereabout is Mrs. Porter's cottage?' asked Wilmington, in whose bosom a perfect hell was now raging. 'Shall I show your lordship the way?' said Harry. The nobleman nodded his head affirmatively; and the little fellow hastened to fetch his cap. They then proceeded in silence until they came within sight of the cottage, which Harry pointed out. 'You may now go home again,' said the Marquis; and Harry obeyed the hint, still totally unsuspecting of the harm which his candid garrulity had accomplished.

"The nobleman, when thus left alone, could no longer restrain the emotions which agitated within him. Turning aside from the path leading towards the cottage, he rushed into the fields, exclaiming aloud, 'Just heavens! on what an abyss was I hovering! But can such diabolical perfidy exist on the part of one so young? Oh! yes—it is too apparent; and my

mother was right when she counselled me never to let my London as a man moving in a sphere beneath my own!'—Having thus given vent to his excited feelings, Wilmington grew more composed; and he now approached the cottage. The door stood open; and, entering without any ceremony, he saw a woman at the same instant descend from a staircase. 'Is your name Porter?' he enquired, speaking in a mild tone as possible. 'Yes, sir,' she answered. 'And it is here that a child who has been, as it were, abandoned by its unnatural mother, is lying dangerously ill?' he said, fixing his eyes keenly upon the woman's countenance. 'Thank God, the dear innocent is better!' exclaimed Mrs. Porter, taken completely off her guard, and even entertaining a suspicion that the gentleman himself might be the father of her nursing. 'Now, confess every thing,' cried the Marquis, 'or it will be the worse for you! Was it not Miss Murray who engaged your services?'—'No, sir; it was the surgeon who attended the lady in her confinement,' interrupted Mrs. Porter, terrified by the stern tone which her querist had suddenly adopted; 'but it was at Miss Murray's house.'—'Enough! enough!' ejaculated Wilmington; and he hurried away from the cottage.

"In the meantime Julia had returned home, having assured herself that the child was out of danger; and as she retraced her way by means of a bye-path, it happened that she did not encounter her brother and the marquis. But little Harry was light of foot; and he, having been dismissed by the nobleman in the way above stated, reached the front door at the same instant as his sister. She was surprised to find that he had been out—still more so when she learnt that Lord Wilmington had called so early. But a frightful sensation seized upon her, when Harry ingenuously observed that the nobleman had taken him to lead the way to the cottage. Subduing her emotions, however, as well as she could, she proceeded to question her brother; and in a short time she ascertained all that had passed between him and the Marquis. Each answer that he gave—each detail that he mentioned, increased the horrible fears which now oppressed her; and, at last—comprehending the full extent of her misfortune,—perceiving the nature of the suspicions which were sure to have seized upon her intended husband,—she uttered a piercing cry, pressed her hands in anguish to her throbbing brow, and exclaimed in a piercing tone, 'Oh! Harry, Harry, you know not what you have done!'—The boy was frightened; and, darting towards his sister, he threw his arms around her neck, imploring her to forgive him if he had acted improperly. Even in the midst of her bitter, bitter anguish, she could not find it in her heart to continue angry with her little brother, who had not wantonly nor wickedly inflicted this appalling injury upon her; and, assuming an appearance of calmness, she became the consoler. In the depth of misery there is a crisis that makes even despair the immediate precursor of hope; and Julia began to reason to herself that all might not be so dark as she had feared. But while she was thus endeavouring to persuade her inmost soul to render itself accessible to consolation, a note was put into her hand by the housekeeper. She glanced at the address which was hurriedly—almost illegibly written, and the ink of which was scarcely dry,—so that she knew it had been penned somewhere in the neighbourhood. With trembling hands she tore it open; and her strength and mental energy sustained

her sufficiently to permit the entire perusal of the letter. Its contents ran thus:—*'I have discovered your frailty, your guilt, your hypocrisy, just in time to save myself from an alliance which would have brought dishonour on my name, and heaped endless miseries on my head. I shall not attempt to reproach you at any length for your conduct towards me: my generous confidence has been met by the blackest duplicity—the most diabolical ingratitude; and your conscience will punish you more—oh! far more severely than any words that I may address to you. Neither shall I adopt the mean and petty revenge of exposing you: but if you ever dare to boast that you were once engaged to be married to the Marquis of Wilmington, then shall I consider that it would be a sin to spare you.'*

"The letter dropped from Julia's hand; and, with a wild shriek, she fell senseless on the floor. The housekeeper administered restoratives, while little Harry, who was himself a prey to the liveliest grief he had ever yet known, hurried to fetch the surgeon. It was the same medical man who had attended upon Lady Caroline Jerningham; and he was prompt in repairing to a house where his former services had been so liberally rewarded. Julia had somewhat recovered in the meantime; but he pronounced her to be in a dangerous state—and, indeed, she seemed quite unconscious of every thing that was passing around her. She was conveyed to her chamber,—medicine was prescribed,—and the surgeon recommended the housekeeper not to leave her mistress alone more than was absolutely necessary, inasmuch as he feared that her brain was affected. Little Harry was inconsolable at his sister's illness—the more especially that he reproached himself with having been the cause of it all; though how he had done the harm he could not by any means understand. Seated by Julia's bed-side, he fixed his tearful eyes on her pale countenance, as she slumbered uneasily; and when hours had passed, and evening came, and still she awoke not, he was afraid that she was dead. The housekeeper, however, assured him to the contrary; and then he bent softly over his sister, to whom the surgeon had administered an opiate, and gently kissed her lips. She murmured a name—it was his own name—and opened her eyes. Complete consciousness returned in a few minutes; and as she rapidly surveyed her misfortune and calculated its extent, she shuddered at the idea of even attempting to meet it with resignation. But for that little brother's sake—the sake of him whom she had found bending over her, and whose name was the first that her lips breathed on her waking,—for his sake she nerved herself to wage war with the world once more. Though a word of explanation—the mere revelation of Lady Caroline's secret would at once restore her to that position so full of hope which she had occupied in the morning,—still her generous heart would not allow her to betray her friend. No: she would sooner pine away and go down to an early grave, heart-broken and spirit-crushed, than proclaim to the Marquis the secret of his noble sister's dishonour!

"It was about seven o'clock in the evening of this dreadful day that a hasty and impatient double-knock at the front door was heard; and a few moments afterwards Lady Caroline Jerningham was ushered into the chamber where Julia was lying. The moment she entered, the patient made a signal for the housekeeper and little Harry to withdraw; and when the two friends were alone together, a most affecting scene took

place. It appeared that the marquis had that afternoon written a letter to his sister, of which the following were the enigmatical contents:—*'I am almost heart-broken, my dearest Caroline, and cannot see you at present. I shall retire into the country for a few weeks—perhaps months—to hide my grief from every eye, and endeavour to regain somewhat of that mental composure which has been almost completely wrecked this day. Julia is unworthy of my love and of your friendship: what the proof of this may be, ask not—seek not to learn;—but I charge you to visit her no more. Your afflicted brother,'* &c.—On the receipt of this note, Lady Caroline, who could not help suspecting that this suddenly wrought change in the sentiments of the Marquis arose from some fearful misunderstanding or some partial discovery respecting the child, had hastened, almost distracted and a prey to intolerable suspense, to Julia's abode; and there she was shocked to find her generous-hearted friend stretched upon a bed of sickness. Embracing each other affectionately, they gave mutual explanations; and Lady Caroline perceived that her worst fears were confirmed. The Marquis had indeed made a discovery relative to the infant; but he was deceived with regard to its maternity. And now who can describe the admiration which Lady Caroline experienced for the character of her friend, when she learnt that the poor girl would rather lie under the dread suspicion of the Marquis—rather resign all her brilliant prospects, and see her heart's fondest affections blighted,—rather, in fact, resign herself to immolation than betray her whose secret she deemed so sacred!

"*'No—no!'* exclaimed the fair patrician, throwing herself upon Julia's bosom, and weeping plentifully; *'this may not be! Never can I permit you, noble-hearted girl, to endure infamy, reproach, and wretchedness for my sake! I will at once follow my brother into the country, throw myself at his feet, confess all, and bring him back to you!'*—And then what will become of you, Caroline?" asked Julia, mingling her tears with those of her friend.—*'Oh! I shall retire from the world, and bury myself, with my innocent babe, in some solitude—in some far-off village, perhaps, where, under a feigned name, I may escape the world's scorn for this fatal weakness which has caused so much misery!'*—and, as she spoke, Lady Caroline's voice indicated the most acute anguish of heart. *'Unless,'* she added, her tone suddenly becoming hoarse and hollow, and her manner unnaturally subdued, *'unless, indeed, my brother, in the first ebullition of his rage should stretch me dead at his feet; and that is the most probable result!'*—*'Then, dearest Caroline,'* exclaimed Julia, speaking in a tone of mingled alarm and earnest entreaty, *'for heaven's sake renounce this mad project! Do not think of seeking your brother and thus exposing yourself to his rage. I owe you a deep, deep debt of gratitude; and now let me pay it by enduring that weight of suspicion against which I may haply bear up, but which would crush and overwhelm you. For never, never can I forget that when I appeared, full of terror and trembling, with the spoilt dress in your mother's presence, your looks gave me encouragement, and your kind words reassured me. Then, when I was leaving your dwelling without the means of even procuring a loaf for my dear little brother and myself, you put gold into my hand. Oh! dear lady, these are manifestations of generosity which never can be forgotten; and, noble as you are by name, you are nobler in heart. It will be my joy—my pride to screen you, who have proved so kind a friend to*

me; and there is no sacrifice that I am unprepared to make in order to save you from unhappiness and shame!"—"It is an angel that speaks!" murmured Lady Caroline, overpowered by this generosity on the part of Julia Murray. "But nothing, nothing," she continued, with reviving energy, and after a few moments' pause, "shall induce me to yield to your desire. I recognise all that is great and noble in your conduct; and so long as I remain possessed of intellect and memory, I shall pray night and morning for the Almighty to bless you, my dearest Julia. I have been frail, and I must bear the consequences. Seek not to wean me from this intention: I should never know a happy moment, were I to permit you to become the victim of my shame!"—"One word!" exclaimed Miss Murray, after a minute's profound reflection: "I will no longer urge you to act contrary to your heart's dictates; but promise me that you will not take a single step towards revealing every thing to your brother and exculpating me, until four-and-twenty hours shall have elapsed. During that interval we shall both have time for serious and calm meditation; and no advantage will result from precipitate haste."—"Yes; I make you this promise, Julia," returned Lady Caroline; "on the condition that when we meet again to-morrow evening, it shall not be to argue whether I am to confess or not, but in what manner the confession can be most suitably and safely made."—"Agreed!" cried Miss Murray: "and to-morrow evening, at seven o'clock, you will visit me again?"—"I will," answered Lady Caroline Jerningham; and she then took her leave of her friend, whom she embraced with the warmth of the most sincere affection.

"On the following day, at about three o'clock in the afternoon, a letter, addressed to Lady Caroline Jerningham, was delivered at the mansion in Hanover Square by a porter, who hurried away the moment he had placed it in the servant's hands. The contents of this note ran as follow:—"Dearest Caroline, it is useless for you to call this evening at the house which I have occupied for so many months, and which was purchased by your excellent brother's money. I shall no longer be the occupant of that house, when this note reaches you. My mind is made up to endure every thing for your sake; and I therefore this day withdraw myself, in company with Harry, into a retirement and an obscurity whither you cannot follow me. It will therefore be unnecessary and ridiculous—I may almost say wicked—for you to make any revelations to your brother. By sacrificing yourself, you would confer no benefit upon me; as nothing shall induce me to alter the plans I have formed respecting the future. Retain profoundly secret all those circumstances the confession of which can have no useful result; and think sometimes of me—for I shall often, often think of you, my well-beloved friend,—although we may never, never meet again!"—This letter, on which were the traces of weeping, produced a stupefying sensation on the part of Lady Caroline. Was it possible that Julia, in the zeal of her ardent friendship, had outwitted the fair patrician, and had won the generous game at which they were playing? No wonder that Miss Murray had requested Caroline to suspend all proceedings for twenty-four hours: in that

time, the noble-hearted girl had consummated the sacrifice of herself! And now nothing could exceed the sincerity and the depth of that grief which seized upon the lady: for an hour after she received the note, she was as one demented; and her confidential maid experienced the utmost difficulty in restraining her from manifestations of feeling which would have excited the strangest suspicions in the household. At length, when she had grown comparatively calm, Lady Caroline, attended by her maid, repaired to Camden Town; but there they only beheld those appearances which corroborated the statements contained in Julia's letter. For the house was shut up; and, on enquiry being made of a neighbour, it was ascertained that Miss Murray, her servant, and her little brother had taken their departure soon after mid-day, although, according to the same authority, the young milliner was evidently suffering from indisposition. The fair patrician's last hope of seeing her friend and weaning her from her intention, was thus destroyed; and the poignancy of her grief was renewed. She proceeded to Mrs. Porter's cottage, where she learnt that Julia had called in the morning to assure herself of the child's convalescence and imprint upon its little countenance a farewell kiss. This touching instance of Julia's goodness of heart moved Lady Caroline to tears; and she reproached herself bitterly for having been the cause of all her friend's present sorrows.

"There, however, appeared to be a remedy which might yet be adopted; and to this measure did the lady make up her mind. She resolved, in fact, to write to her brother without delay, inform him of every thing, and urge him to lose no time in discovering the retreat of Julia, that justice—full and ample justice—might be done to her. Accordingly, on the following morning she penned a long letter to the Marquis of Wilmington, imploring him to forgive her for the dishonour she had brought upon the family, and drawing such a picture of Julia's generosity in sacrificing herself for a friend, that she wept long and plentifully over the pages as she perused them. When this epistle had been despatched to the post, Caroline's heart felt easier; and she said to herself, 'Even if my brother should wreak the bitterest vengeance upon me, I can endure his resentment with resignation; for I now have the consciousness of performing a sacred and solemn duty.'—The Dowager-Marchioness, in the meantime, had been suffering through indisposition which confined her much to her chamber; and she did not therefore perceive any particular variations in the manner and aspect of her daughter.

CHAPTER CXLIII.

CONCLUSION OF THE HISTORY OF THE DRESS-MAKER: A LOVE STORY.

"Two days after Lady Caroline Jerningham's letter had been sent, the Marquis of Wilmington arrived in London; and, hastening to Hanover Square, he obtained an immediate interview with his sister. Pale, trembling, and unable to endure his glance, she awaited in torturing suspense the first words that should issue from his lips; and never was relief from agonising feelings more welcome or more complete, than when the Marquis, taking his sister's hand, said in a gentle though mournful voice, 'Caroline, I am not come to reproach you—much less to add to your

* The readers of the First Series of "THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON" will recollect the character of Lady Adeline Enfield in the "History of an Unfortunate Woman." Lady Caroline Jerningham is drawn expressly in contrast with that heroine,—one of the objects of "THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON" being to depict the good and the bad—the generous and the selfish—of all classes of society.

unctions by the heartless cruelty and absurd inutility of an exposure. No: I give you all my sympathy; and I thank you most sincerely for having confessed every thing, that you might restore your friend to my favour.'—Lady Caroline threw herself into her brother's arms, and wept upon his breast; but when the emotions attendant upon this meeting had somewhat subsided, the Marquis said, 'Heaven be thanked that Julia is innocent! Deeply, deeply as I deplore the sad circumstances involved in your revelation, Caroline, yet it is a relief to know that she—that poor, suffering, wrongly suspected girl—is worthy of all my love! And if I before loved her—if I before esteemed and admired her as the pattern of every thing great and noble, generous and amiable in Woman,—Oh! now what strength have those sentiments acquired! No time must be lost in finding her out; and this moment shall I enter upon the search.'—The Marquis then took a hasty leave of his sister, and in the first instance repaired to Mr. Richardson to consult him upon the subject. Without in any way compromising his sister, the Marquis related enough to let the worthy lawyer know that Julia had been unjustly suspected—that her innocence was completely established, and that he now longed to find out her retreat, with the view to make her the fullest possible reparation. Mr. Richardson then stated that three days previously a porter had called on him, bringing the key of the house at Camden Town, with an intimation that Miss Murray surrendered up the tenement to its proprietor, with all the furniture it contained,—in fact, in the same condition as when the property was made over to her. A tear stole into the eye of the Marquis, as he received this proof of Julia's strict integrity; and Mr. Richardson advised that an advertisement, drawn up in a manner calculated to strike Miss Murray's comprehension, but ambiguous to the public generally, should be kept standing in the *Times* and other widely circulated newspapers until her retreat should have been discovered. The Marquis approved of this plan; and, leaving his solicitor to execute it, he departed from the office to pursue his search elsewhere. He now proceeded to Camden Town, and (having the key with him) entered the house; but delicacy forbade him to penetrate into any other rooms save the parlours; and there he found not a letter nor a scrap of paper that might afford any clue to the place whither Julia had retired. His heart was heavy—his grief was profound; and frequent sighs rent his manly breast as he repaired to the cottage where the child—his sister's child—dwelt under the care of Mrs. Porter. His strange manner on his previous visit did not obtain for him a very welcome reception at the hands of that female; but when she found that he spoke kindly and inquired anxiously concerning the infant, her reserve began to dissipate, and she at last thought him a very agreeable gentleman. The child was brought to him, and he kissed it affectionately. An allusion which Mrs. Porter happened to make to Miss Murray, enabled the Marquis to turn the conversation upon that loved being who seemed lost to him; and now he heard the warmest and sincerest praises uttered in regard to her; but not a syllable affording a trace of her present abode. In fact, it was very evident that Mrs. Porter was as ignorant as himself in that respect; and still was it with a heavy heart that the nobleman turned away to prosecute his search elsewhere.

"He had learnt from his sister that Julia, her little brother, and the old housekeeper had taken their departure together in a hackney-coach; and he con-

cluded that the vehicle was hired from some stand in the neighbourhood. Behold, then, this rich and well-born peer visiting all the stations of cabs and coaches in the vicinity, and pursuing his enquiries amongst a class of men whom his liberality alone succeeded in divesting of their habitual insolence. But still all his endeavours to solve the painful mystery were fruitless; and, after a weary day's researches, he returned home, exhausted in physical energy and worn down by mental depression, to his magnificent house in Belgrave Square. His reliance was now in the advertisements which were to be inserted in the newspapers; but even this hope was almost stifled within him by the reminiscence that Julia seldom read the public journals. Day after day passed—weeks glided by—these had swollen into months in the lapse of time—and winter returned;—but still no trace of Julia! In the interval, matters of importance had occurred in respect to Lady Caroline Jerningham. The child had died in a fit of convulsions, to which it was subject, and in spite of the tender care of Mrs. Porter and the attentions of the medical man: the remains of the infant were interred in the churchyard of Old Saint Pancras; and the Porters, who were well rewarded for their kindness to the child from the moment of its birth until that of its death, still remain in ignorance of the real name and the rank of its mother. Not many weeks after the removal from this earthly sphere of the evidence of Lady Caroline's frailty, Lord Hartley returned home from abroad; and his first act, on arriving in London, was to hasten to Hanover Square. His heart had remained constant to Lady Caroline; and he now boldly claimed her hand of the Marchioness, who received him most graciously, there being, in the Dowager's eyes, a vast deal of difference between the noble and wealthy Baron Hartley of Hartley, and the poor Lieutenant Quentin of His Majesty's Ship *The Tremendous*. The *Morning Post* accordingly announced the 'approaching marriage in high life;' and the ceremony took place in November, 1835,—precisely one year after the date of the commencement of our tale.

"Thus Lady Caroline Jerningham became Lady Hartley: she was united to the object of her affection;—but her happiness was not complete. Every day—every hour did she think of poor Julia Murray; and her husband, to whom she had confided every thing, shared in her deep anxiety to obtain a clue to that excellent young woman. The Marquis of Wilmington had put into execution every means which human ingenuity could devise to procure that clue: but all to no effect; and he now gave himself up to despair. His health began to fail him; and his appearance speedily grew much altered. Vainly did his sister endeavour to console him: she also required solace, and almost in respect to the same cause,—for if the one mourned the loss of an intended bride, the other deplored that of a dear friend!

"I said that the incidents of my tale had brought me down to the month of November, 1835; and it now becomes necessary to make some mention of Julia Murray. It was a night of pouring rain and gushing wind, as on that when she first encountered the Marquis of Wilmington; and the unhappy young woman was seated in a miserable garret in some street near Covent Garden Market. The cheerless chamber was almost completely denuded of furniture; and the little that was in it, belonged not to her. Not a spark of fire appeared in the hearth;—the cupboard door was opened, but no food was seen on the shelves;—and the

candle that shed a fitful light around the bare, damp walls, was every moment in danger of being extinguished by the cold draught from the ill-closed window. Leaning her head upon her hand, and her elbow on the table, Julia sat, gazing down on the upturned countenance of her brother who occupied a stool at her feet. Pale and wan were their faces: gone was the bloom of health from the cheeks of the once happy, beauteous boy,—gone, too, was the delicate tinge of carnation that had been wont to enhance the loveliness of his sister. Misery was in that garret—misery for *two*—misery for that almost heart-broken young woman and that affectionate, grateful boy. The want of needle-work and illness had plunged Julia into the direst poverty: she could have borne it all had she been by herself—borne it almost without repining;—but when she looked on the pale face of her little brother, saw that he was famishing for want, and knew also that he endeavoured to conceal his hunger from her for fear of increasing *her* grief,—oh! it was this—it was *this* that crushed and overwhelmed her! She glanced around: there was not an article of clothing that could be now spared to pledge, save her scanty shawl—and then how could she go abroad to ask for needlework without it? Heavens! twelve hours had the boy already fasted—twenty-four hours had elapsed since Julia had tasted a morsel of food;—for she had almost forced the last crust into his mouth! And now how many hours more must elapse ere a chance might present itself to afford them a meal? And if no work could be obtained, what were they to do? What, indeed!

"In the midst of all these bitter—harrowing reflections, a thought—or rather a reminiscence flashed to Julia's mind;—but it was only to plunge her more deeply into the abyss of woe, and not to solace her. Just one year had elapsed since she had first met the Marquis of Wilmington,—just one year, day for day: and through how many vicissitudes had she and her darling brother passed in that period! They had known prosperity and happiness: they had also experienced the bitterest misery, and yet they had not deserved the vengeance of heaven: but, then, those whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth! Still pure and guileless—still innocent and artless, Julia Murray's principles had remained unshaken by the rude contest which she had been compelled to endure with the world's ills; and her brother was still the same affectionate, good, endearing boy as when I first introduced you to him. Oh! it was cruel—it was cruel that *they* should suffer thus—those poor orphans who had never injured a living soul, who clung to each other so tenderly, and who night and morning put up their prayers to the Almighty that He would be pleased to change their wretched, wretched lot. But, alas! those supplications—so sincere, so earnest, so respectful and adoring towards the Majesty of Heaven—remained apparently unheard; and on the particular night to which allusion has been made, do we find that sister and brother on the verge of perishing through sheer destitution!

"Harry," said Julia, after a long pause, "are you not very hungry?"—"Not very, dear sister," he returned, while tears started into his eyes.—"Oh! my darling boy, you are starving!" she cried frantically, as she strained him to her breast: then, growing more composed, she said, "But this must not be! Here, Harry, take this shawl over to that shop which you see opposite, give it to any one whom you may see behind the counter, and you will receive some money and a

small card in exchange. Then go to the baker's and buy a loaf; and return as quickly as you can."—The boy hesitated; and at length said, "But, Julia dear, what will you do without your shawl? You cannot go out."—"And you cannot starve," she returned hastily; as she almost thrust him, but not harshly, out of the room. Then, when the door closed behind him, she reseated herself, and burst into an agony of tears. It was the first time she had ever sent Harry to the pawnbroker—the first time she had ever allowed him to go out into the streets alone after dusk. And this was not all that pained her: Oh! she was oppressed with the most direful apprehensions—for now she was indeed a prisoner in that wretched garret—she could not go out to seek for work, and work would not be brought to her. And again, and again, and again—for the thousandth time that day—did she ask herself what was to be done, and what was to become of them? While she was wrapt up in these harrowing reflections, she heard certain well-known—too well-known steps ascending the stairs; and now she felt that even the crushing amount of misery which already weighed upon her, was not complete. The door was thrown open; and a stout, elderly, red-faced woman, who had evidently been drinking, walked unceremoniously into the chamber. "Now, Miss," she cried, almost ferociously, "are you going to pay me the three weeks' rent that's due? If not, be so kind as to tramp, and make room for them as will pay; 'cos I've a respectable married couple which is ready to take the place this very night."—"If you will wait a few minutes," answered Julia, in a faint tone, "I will pay you as much as I can."—"Come, that won't do for me," vociferated the woman: "I see your brother go out with your shawl, and I know what's what. But if you're obliged to spout your things to pay a trifle this week, how will you be able to pay any at all next Saturday, much less cash up altogether?"—"Heavens! have patience, my dear madam, and I will endeavour to pay you all, as soon as possible!" said the poor young woman, reduced to despair.—"Patience, indeed!" repeated the landlady, contemptuously: "and who will have patience with me? There is the Taxes will call on Monday morning; and the Water Rate has been put off till he's tired of coming near the place. So I can't and won't wait no longer for such a beggar as you."—"At this goading insolence Julia's grief redoubled.—"Oh! crying won't pay no bills," ejaculated the inhuman landlady. "And now I think on it, I'll just look at the bed-clothes and see that you haven't pawned none of the blankets!"—"I would sooner starve—aye, and see my brother perish through want also, than commit such an act!" cried Julia, starting to her feet, while her indignation actually tended to mitigate the acuteness of her grief. "Well, I 'spose you're honest," said the woman, somewhat ashamed of herself: "but I must have my money to-night all the same; if not, you and your brother had better turn out at once."—"I repeat that it is impossible for me to pay you all I owe this evening," exclaimed poor Julia, now condescending to the adoption of a tone of appeal; "and I implore you not to drive me and that dear boy homeless into the streets."—"A pretty gal like you need never want money," said the woman, fixing a menacing look upon the unhappy dress-maker; "and if you would only take my advice ——"—"Begone," cried Julia in a voice so penetrating that it seemed to thrill through the brain of the vile wretch who was about to develop the most infamous resources to the view of

that pure-minded girl.—'Begone, indeed!' repeated the woman, recovering her insolence: 'that's a pretty thing to say to me, that you owe money to. However, once more I tell you that I *will* be paid to-night; or else, when my husband comes home from the public-house, off you'll bundle!'—Thus speaking, the wretch bounced out of the room, leaving the door wide open behind her.

"Julia wrung her hands in despair; and again she asked herself those unanswerable questions—What would become of them? and what was to be done? At this moment, when her brain appeared to reel and reason was rocking on its throne, the sounds of hasty steps ascending the stairs met her ear, and she heard Harry's voice exclaim, 'Up higher still—to the very top!' And up those hasty footsteps came:—good heavens! were fresh miseries in store for her? But scarcely had this thought traversed poor Julia's imagination, when some one darted into the room—and as she was sinking on the floor, through terror, want, and exhaustion, she was received in the arms of the Marquis of Wilmington!—'Julia, dearest Julia!' he cried, in an impassioned tone, as he strained the insensible form of his beloved one to his breast: and that voice, sounding on her ear as if heard in the midst of a dream, recalled her to herself;—and opening her eyes slowly, she encountered the tender looks that were bent upon her.—'Is it possible?' she exclaimed, tearing herself from the nobleman's embrace: 'your lordship here?'—'Yes: here to implore your pardon for the past; to declare to you how profound is the regret and how bitter the remorse I have experienced for the unfeeling haste with which I judged you on the barest suspicion; and to offer you my hand, Julia,' added the Marquis, 'if you will now condescend to accept it!'—But I need not pause to describe in detail the discourse which now ensued: suffice it to say that the nobleman gave the fullest explanation of all that had occurred since he had last seen Julia—how his sister had confessed her frailty, and thus cleared up the suspicion which had so unfortunately fallen upon Julia—how the child had died—how Lady Caroline had married Lord Hartley—and how every possible search had been made for so many long, weary months, after Miss Murray. It must be added that the Marquis, in his almost ceaseless wanderings about the metropolis in the prosecution of that search, happened on this memorable evening to pass through the very neighbourhood where Julia resided; and as Harry emerged from the pawnbroker's shop, the light flashed full upon the little fellow's countenance, which, in spite of its altered appearance, was immediately recognised by the Marquis.

"But little more remains to be told. A messenger was instantly despatched to Hartley House with a note from Lord Wilmington; and in less than an hour his sister Caroline, accompanied by her faithful lady's maid, who had charge of a box full of clothes, arrived in her carriage at the door of the house where Julia occupied the miserable garret! Affecting indeed was the meeting between the two friends; and while the Marquis took Harry away with him to the nearest ready-made clothes' shop to equip the boy from head to foot in new apparel, Lady Hartley hastily made such a change in Julia's appearance, by means of the contents of the box before alluded to, that when his lordship returned he was charmed to see that, though pale, she was still eminently beautiful. In the meantime the rumour had spread throughout the house how a great nobleman and a great lady had come to take the poor dress-

maker away in their carriage; and now the vile woman, who only an hour before had menaced Julia with ejection—who had insulted her by offering to search the few miserable things in the room to see if any had been made away with—and who had hinted at an infamous proposal from which the young creature's soul recoiled in horror and loathing,—that same detestable wretch was now most assiduous in offering the use of her parlour and rendering herself so officiously busy, that Lady Hartley was forced to order her in a peremptory manner to retire. In fine, all necessary preparations being made so that Julia and her brother might appear in a becoming way at the splendid mansion whither they were now about to repair, the happy party entered the carriage, which drove straight to Hartley House, where Caroline's husband received Julia and Harry in the kindest possible manner.

"Thus was the aspect of affairs signally changed; and from the cold, cheerless garret, where want stared them in the face, were the sister and brother suddenly wafted into the very bosom of luxury, comfort, and happiness. Virtue met with its reward, after the many trials to which it had been subjected, and the numerous temptations it had triumphantly passed through. Mr. Richardson, the lawyer, was overjoyed when the Marquis called upon him next morning and related all that had happened; and the instant his lordship had taken his departure, the worthy solicitor hastened to Hanover Square, resolved, if possible, to accomplish a certain project which he had in view. Presenting himself to the Dowager-Marchioness, he argued with her upon the inutilty and injustice, the folly and the cruelty of her opposition to an alliance which so nearly regarded her son's happiness; and he dilated so warmly upon the good qualities of Julia Murray, that her ladyship, who had at first heard him with impatience, began to listen attentively. In a word, Mr. Richardson succeeded in persuading the Marchioness to have the credit of assenting to an union which she had not the power to prevent; and the policy of this step at last triumphed over her other repugnances. She accordingly rang the bell, ordered the carriage, and proceeded with the lawyer to Hartley House, where her presence augmented the happiness already experienced beneath that roof. Thus nothing was now wanting to complete the felicity of all those in whom, I hope, you are interested; and it was astonishing how speedily the bloom came back to the countenance of Julia, and the ruddy hues of health to the cheeks of little Harry.

"Six weeks after the discovery of the orphans in their wretched garret, Julia became the Marchioness of Wilmington. Happy—happy was that bridal, and beautiful was the blushing bride—so beautiful that a stranger would not have suspected the privations and miseries which she had undergone. And, as if heaven, in its justice, were determined to afford a signal proof that though it can chasten, it can also reward as fully—from the day that this union took place, Julia and her brother have not known a care. Possessing the power to do good, the Marchioness of Wilmington has been enabled to soothe many an afflicted heart; and her experience of the past has taught her that the severest misery is that which pines unseen and hides itself in garrets—not that which obtrudes itself, in the shape of mendicity, upon the public eye. Her *secret charities* are therefore boundless; and the elevation of such a woman to rank and the possession of immense wealth, has proved beneficial to thousands. I must not forget to observe that the housekeeper who had accompanied

her on her departure from Camden Town, and who had subsequently returned home, at Julia's request, to her friends, once more became an attendant in the household of the mistress whom she loved; and every one who had in any way shown kindness to my heroine when she was but the humble dress-maker, was sought out and liberally rewarded, by her whose heart had undergone no change although she had become the Marchioness of Wilmington."

CHAPTER CXLIV.

DOVER.

It must not be supposed that this long tale was related without an interval of rest. When it broke off at the end of the hundred and forty-second chapter, the travellers were just on the point of entering Rochester, where they lunched; and, after this brief halt, they pursued their journey, Charles resuming the thread of his narrative, to which Perdita listened with deep interest.

The young woman experienced an ineffable pleasure in drinking in with her ears the rich tones of her lover's voice; and the pathetic nature of his story increased the tenderness which she felt for him. She, who had defied the influence of the blind deity, was wounded by his shaft; and the more she saw of Charles Hatfield, the less selfish became her passion—the more sincere her attachment.

Mrs. Fitzhardinge read, with a keen eye, all that was passing in her daughter's mind; and there were moments when she could scarcely restrain her rage at the idea that Perdita had succeeded so skilfully in throwing her into the back-ground. But the old woman resolved to abide her time—in the hope that circumstances might yet enable her to resume her sway, and compel the enamoured couple to bend to the dictates of her will.

The journey was pursued in safety, and in freedom from any unpleasant interruption, until the post-chaise entered the town of Dover. There the travellers were to pass the night; and thence they were to embark on the ensuing morning for Calais.

They took up their quarters at an hotel, where an excellent dinner was provided; and in the evening Charles Hatfield and Perdita rambled together upon the beach, Mrs. Fitzhardinge remaining at the inn on the plea of fatigue, but in reality because her daughter made her a private sign to intimate that her company was not needed.

It was a summer evening of surpassing loveliness: the sea was calm and tranquil in its mighty bed, agitated only at its margin where wavelets, so small that they might almost be denominated ripples, murmured on the beach;—and the western horizon was gorgeous with purple, and orange, and gold—the swathing robes of the setting sun.

There were many ladies and gentlemen walking on the Marine Parade, and enjoying the freshness of the air after the oppressive heat of the sultry day. Amongst the loungers, several officers belonging to the garrison were conspicuous by their scarlet coats; and giddy, silly young ladies of sixteen or seventeen felt themselves supremely happy if they could only secure the attentions of these military beaux.

Here and there were long seats, painted green, and occupied by ladies, their male companions standing in lounging attitudes; and the conversation that occupied these groups was for the most part of a frivolous

nature,—for people at watering places only seek to kill time, and not to use it for intellectual purposes.

On one of the benches just alluded to, was placed a middle-aged mamma with her three marriageable daughters, who were pretty, chatty, agreeable girls, according to the general meaning of the epithets: at all events, whenever Mrs. Matson appeared on the Parade with the three Misses Matson, the officers were sure to steal away from other groups or parties in order to join the new-comers—to the immense gratification of the objects of this preference, and to the huge mortification of the Jones's, the Smiths, the Jenkins, the Greens, and the Browns.

"Were you at Lady Noakes's last evening, Captain Phinnikin?" enquired the eldest Miss Matson of a gallant officer of some four or five and twenty, who was lounging near her.

"No—not I, faith!" was the reply given in a drawling tone, as if the gallant officer aforesaid were a martyr to that dreadful malady termed *cnnui*. "Lady Noakes's parties are such slow affairs—I have quite abjured them. Besides," he added, suddenly recollecting that this was an excellent opportunity to throw in a compliment, "I knew you weren't to be there."

"Oh! dear, no!" exclaimed Miss Julia Matson—the second of the marriageable sisters: "one does meet such strange people at her ladyship's, that we really could not think of accepting the invitation."

"Well, but you must recollect, my dear," observed Mrs. Matson, in a tone which seemed to be of mild reproof, "that poor dear Lady Noakes is only the widow of a brewer who was mayor of Deal or Sandwich, I forget which, and was knighted by William the Fourth for taking up some address to his Majesty."

"That's all!" said Miss Anna-Maria Matson, the third sister: "and therefore I am sure no one need be surprised that Lady Noakes is glad to fill her rooms with any body she can get."

"Well, I was there last night," observed another young officer—a lieutenant in the same regiment with Captain Phinnikin, and who formed one of the group at present occupying our attention: "and I must say that the supper was excellent."

"Oh! but, Mr. Pink," exclaimed the eldest Miss Matson, reproachfully, "it is so very easy to give a good supper—but not so easy to make the evening agreeable."

"Granted!" rejoined the lieutenant: "and I must candidly admit that no parties are so agreeable as those at your house."

"Flatterer!" cried Miss Matson, with a sweet smile. "I suppose the Browns were at her ladyship's last night."

"Oh! certainly. You meet them every where."

"And, faith! Miss Amelia Brown is a deuced pleasant girl—deuced pleasant," observed Captain Phinnikin.

"Well, I really never could see any thing particular in her," said the eldest Miss Matson. "Besides—you know what her grandfather is?" she added, sinking her voice to a confidential tone, and hastily glancing around to assure herself that the object of her remark was not nigh enough to overhear her.

"Pon my honour, I never heard!" responded Captain Phinnikin.

"They do say—but, mind, I will not assert it on my own authority," continued Miss Matson,—“at the same time, I believe it is pretty well ascertained—”

"Oh! certainly—beyond all doubt," exclaimed Miss Julia, tossing her head contemptuously.



"I never heard it contradicted!" added Miss Anna-Maria.

"What do they say the grandfather is?" demanded Captain Phinikie.

Again did Miss Matson look anxiously around: then, lowering her voice to a whisper, and assuming as mysterious an air as possible, she said, "A hatter!"

"Oh, you naughty, gossiping girls!" cried Mrs. Matson, shaking her head with an affected depreciation of her daughters' scandal-loving propensities, but in reality enjoying the little-tattle.

"Well, ma," said Miss Julia, "I am sure there is no harm in telling the truth; and I thought that every one knew what Miss Brown's grandfather was—just the same as it's no secret about the Greens being related to a soap-boiler."

"Hush! my dear," exclaimed Mrs. Matson, putting her finger to her lip: "we really must not pull people to pieces in this way. At the same time I candidly confess that it is annoying to find so many low persons at the very watering-place which we chose for the summer. I don't wish to be severe upon anybody; but if Mr. Thompson, who is known to be a retired draper, will allow people to address their letters to him as *Thomas*

Thompson, Esquire, he must expect to be talked about."

"And then those Miss Thompsons, who give themselves such airs!" cried the eldest Miss Matson, with an indignant gesture.

"I am sure they made quite frights of themselves last Sunday at church," added Miss Julia, "with their dresses after the latest Parisian fashion!"

"Besides, pink bonnets don't at all become *their* dark complexions," observed Miss Anna-Maria.

"Ladies must have very good complexions indeed, for pink bonnets to suit them," drawled forth Captain Phinikie, smiling languidly at the same time;—for the three Misses Matson all wore bonnets of a roseate hue—a fact which they *apparently* have entirely forgotten while speaking of the Misses Thompson.

At this moment, Lieutenant Pink uttered an ejaculation of surprise; and the rest of the group, turning their eyes in the same direction in which his were bent, beheld a very handsome young gentleman to whose arm hung a young lady of marvellous beauty.

"They're strangers here," observed Miss Matson the eldest.

"New-comers," continued Miss Julia.

"But nothing very particular, I dare say," added Miss Anna-Maria.

And having thus expressed themselves, the three sisters turned towards the officers; but they were much piqued and annoyed to find that those two gallant gentlemen were still surveying the attractive couple with the deepest interest.

"That face is familiar to me, Pink," cried Captain Phinnikin.

"And to me also. But where I have seen it before, I cannot recollect," observed the lieutenant. "Upon my soul, she is a magnificent woman!"

"A splendid creature!" ejaculated the captain, forgetting his habitual drawl for a moment. "Faith! I remember—and yet—no—it is impossible!"

"Yes—it is impossible—it cannot be!" cried Mr. Pink, as if divining and echoing the other's thoughts. "But I am sure I have seen her before! And will you believe me, Phinnikin, when I assure you that, at the first glance, I thought—"

"Egad! it is her profile—her figure!" cried the captain, pursuing the train of his own thoughts, as his eyes followed the young couple who were passing leisurely along at a little distance, and quite unconscious of the interest that one of them at least was creating.

"Well—it strikes me that it is the same!" observed the lieutenant, his amazement every moment becoming greater, and his uncertainty less.

"Who do you take her to be?" demanded Phinnikin, turning abruptly towards his brother-officer.

"Perdita," responded the lieutenant, without hesitation.

"And yet—in England—so changed too, in circumstances—and in company with that genteel young fellow—"

"All those things occurred to me likewise," interrupted Mr. Pink.

"Let us convince ourselves!" cried the captain; and the military gentlemen, with a somewhat abrupt and unceremonious bow to the Matson family, walked away together, arm-in-arm.

"Well, I never!" exclaimed the eldest Miss Matson, now tossing her head more indignantly than on any previous occasion, yet looking wistfully after the two really handsome and elegant, though conceited and coxcombical young officers, whose fine figures were rapidly receding along the parade.

"I could not have supposed that Captain Phinnikin would have been guilty of such rudeness!" said Miss Julia.

"Oh! as for the captain—I was prepared for any thing with *him*," observed Miss Anna-Maria: "but it's Mr. Pink that I'm astonished at!"

"I am sure the captain is the best behaved of the two," exclaimed Julia.

"That shows your ignorance, Miss," said Anna-Maria, tartly.

"I know what's genteel as well as you, I should hope," retorted Julia.

"Do n't be cross, my love," said Anna-Maria, affecting a soothing tone.

"And don't you pretend to know better than one two years older than yourself," cried Julia. "As for you," she continued, addressing herself to her eldest sister, "I was quite surprised to hear how you went on about the Browns and the Thompsons. How foolish we should all look if it were found out that Uncle Ben was a pawnbroker in Lambeth Marsh—"

"Hush! girls—hush! Drat your tongues—how

they are going!" interrupted Mrs. Matson, in a hoarse and hasty whisper.

"I am sure, ma, Julia talked as much about the Browns and the Thompsons as I did," said the eldest daughter; "and now she is trying to quarrel with me about it. But here come the Thompsons," she added abruptly, as her eyes wandered along the parade.

Mrs. Matson and the three young ladies all smoothed their countenances in a moment; and nothing could be more amiable, affable, or charming than the manner in which they rose simultaneously to greet the Misses Thompson—two tall, handsome, well-dressed, and really most genteel girls, let their father have been what he might.

"Oh! my dear Miss Thompson," cried the eldest Miss Matson, "I am so delighted to see you! How well you are looking, to be sure!"

"We were talking about you only a few minutes ago, to Captain Phinnikin and Mr. Pink," said Julia; "and we were admiring those dears of bonnets that you wore last Sunday at church."

"I am glad you liked them," responded the elder Miss Thompson. "But how happened it that you were not at Lady Noakes's last night?"

"Well—we do n't mind telling you, dear," said Miss Matson the elder: "the truth is that we were not invited; and I suppose it must have been an oversight of her ladyship."

"Her ladyship was quite surprised that you were not present," returned Miss Thompson: "she assured me that a card had been duly forwarded to you."

"Oh! how provoking!" cried all three Misses Matson at the same moment, and as it were in the same breath. "The invitation must have miscarried somehow or another. We would not have been absent for the world if we had received the card."

"But, my dear Miss Thompson," continued the eldest Miss Matson, "as you and your dear sister are so intimate with Lady Noakes, perhaps you would just hint that the invitation did miscarry—"

"Oh! certainly," replied the good-natured young lady thus appealed to. "But we must say good bye now—for we promised papa not to stay out late, and it is already near eight o'clock."

"How is that dear good soul, Mr. Thompson?" asked Mrs. Matson. "I was speaking of him to Captain Phinnikin and Mr. Pink just now, and saying what great respect we all entertained for him."

"Thank you, my dear madam—papa is quite well," returned Miss Thompson. "But we must really say good bye, for we expect the Greens to drop into supper presently—"

"Delightful girls, the Miss Greens!" exclaimed Mrs. Matson; "and very well connected, I have heard."

"Oh! certainly—their uncle is a Member of Parliament," responded Miss Thompson. "But good bye."

"Good bye," repeated her sister; and away they went—happy, joyous, kind-hearted, and good girls, who would not have suffered their tongues to utter a word of scandal,—thus proving a striking contrast with the Matson family.

"What a vulgar buoyancy of spirits the eldest Miss Thompson always has!" exclaimed the senior of the three sisters, after a pause. "I really can scarcely seem commonly polite to her."

"And the youngest is just like her in that respect," observed Julia.

"They are the rudest and worst-behaved girls in Dover, except the Miss Greens," added Mrs. Matson.

"Well," said Anna-Maria, "since I have heard that the Greens are related to a Member of Parliament, I don't fancy them to be so vulgar as I used to do. Oh! what a thing it would be to get acquainted with a Member, and have him at our parties next winter! Would n't the Snipsons be in a way?"

"And the Styles's!" added Julia.

"Yes—and the Tubleys, who are so proud of their Irish Member!" exclaimed the eldest Miss Matson. "Oh! ma, let us make up to the Greens and get as friendly with them as possible; so that we may be on visiting terms with them when we go back to London, —and then we shall be introduced to their uncle, the Member."

"By all means," said Mrs. Matson, charmed with the suggestion. "I will persuade your papa to allow us to give a party next week, on purpose for the Greens."

In the meantime Captain Phinnikin and Mr. Pink had proceeded somewhat rapidly along the Marine Parade, until they had reached the extremity, when they turned, and walked more slowly, so as to meet Charles Hatfield and Perdita.

"To-morrow, at this time," said the infatuated young man, as the syren leant confidently upon his arm, "we shall be far on our road to Paris: and within three days from this moment, my beloved one, you will be mine! Oh! I believe firmly that we were intended for each other—and therefore happiness awaits us!"

"To be with you, Charles, is happiness indeed," returned Perdita, with that melting softness of tone which gave her words so exquisite a charm, and made every chord in her lover's heart thrill with rapture: then, casting upon him a sweet glance which drank in his own, she said, "I am rejoiced that we have taken this decided step—for in London, I was so fearful that your relatives might adopt means to separate you from me!"

"No—that could not be, dearest Perdita," he observed: "for I am of an age at which no parental despotism could be legally enforced; and I have acquainted you with every thing that has already passed between my father and myself. Were I a weak-minded boy, I should perhaps have yielded to his threats or to my mother's entreaties: but I have chosen to act for myself and on my own responsibility—and I do not repent the decision."

"And never—never shall you repent, my beloved Charles," murmured Perdita, with no affectation of feeling, but under the influence of that passionate tenderness which she in reality experienced towards the young man. "And, oh! how delightful is it to be your companion in such a delicious evening walk as this—by the scarcely rippling sea—and at the hour when the sun is sinking to its ocean-bed!"

"Yes;—and while with you, my Perdita," responded Charles, "I seem to feel as if we two were alone together—sole witnesses of the scene! I observe not the other loungers: I see only my Perdita—hear only her voice!"

At this moment his fair companion, to whom he was addressing those words of heart-felt tenderness, appeared to start violently; for his arm to which she clung was suddenly jerked by her hand with some degree of force. Charles instinctively raised his head, which had been bent partially towards her ear; and glancing straight before him, he beheld two officers staring most rudely, as he thought, at his well-beloved and beautiful Perdita.

"What means this insolence?" he exclaimed, in a tone of irritation.

"Let us turn back, Charles—dearest Charles," murmured Perdita, in a faint and tremulous tone; and she wheeled him round, as it were, with extraordinary alacrity.

A loud burst of laughter on the part of the officers met their ears; and Charles, uttering an ejaculation of rage, was about to relinquish his fair companion's arm and rush back to demand an explanation, when Perdita said, "In the name of heaven, molest them not—I implore you!"

And she hurried him away.

"My God! Perdita," he said, when they were at some distance from the spot where the officers had stopped short to gaze upon Perdita, and where their complete recognition of her had betrayed them into an act of rudeness which they almost immediately afterwards regretted—for they felt that they had no right to insult the young woman by laughing at her altered circumstances; "my God! Perdita," said Charles, labouring under a painful state of excitement; "what means this conduct of those unmannerly fellows? and wherefore will you not permit me to chastise them?"

"Would you expose me to the ridicule of all the persons assembled on the Parade?" demanded Perdita, who had now recovered her presence of mind—at least sufficiently to feel the necessity of immediately allaying her lover's excitement.

"But those officers insulted you—insulted you grossly, Perdita!" cried Charles, who did not, however, entertain the remotest suspicion prejudicial to the young woman, but merely felt deeply indignant at an insolence which he could not understand, and which was so completely unprovoked.

"They insulted *us*—they insulted *you* as well as myself, Charles," answered Perdita, hastily: "it was because you were bending, as it were, over me while you spoke—because your head was approached so close to my ear—and because I was listening with such unconcealed delight to your tender words! They saw that we were lovers—that we felt as if we were alone even amidst the crowd of loungers—"

"Yes: it must have been as you say!" cried Charles, receiving Perdita's ingenious explanation as natural and conclusive, and now absolutely wondering at his own stupidity in not penetrating the matter before.

"You may conceive," resumed the artful girl, "how ashamed and bewildered I suddenly felt, when, on raising my eyes, I saw the two officers standing still only a dozen yards in advance, and gazing upon us in the rudest possible manner. I instantly understood the truth: women, dear Charles, are sometimes more sharp-sighted than your sex. It flashed to my mind that our manner had betrayed that we were lovers; and hence my emotions! And can you wonder, my beloved Charles, if I hurried you away from a scene where you incurred the chance of becoming involved in a quarrel with those fire-eaters?"

"In good truth, my Perdita," said Hatfield, now smiling, "they seemed to me—if I might judge by the short glimpse I had of them—to be rather fitted for the drawing-room than to smell gunpowder."

"Oh! that may be," exclaimed the young woman, her voice still continuing tremulous and her manner imploring: "nevertheless, I would not for the world that you should fall into danger! Consider, Charles, how dreadful would be my feelings, were I to know that you were about to fight a duel! Oh! my blood runs cold in my veins when I think of it! But were

you to fall in such hostile meeting—Ah! my God, what would become of your unhappy, wretched Perdita?"

"Dearest—sweetest girl!" cried the enraptured young man: "how blest am I in the possession of such a love as thine!"

And he gazed tenderly upon her as he spoke, pressing her arm at the same time with his own: for now her countenance was flushed with the emotions that agitated in her bosom; and, as the rays of the setting sun played upon her face, she seemed lovely beyond all possibility of description.

They returned to the hotel; and, having partaken of supper, sought their respective chambers at a somewhat early hour—for Mrs. Fitzhardinge and Perdita complained of fatigue, and Charles knew that the ensuing day's travelling would prove even more wearisome still.

The reader has seen how artfully the young woman contrived to find an explanation for the untoward and menacing event which had occurred upon the Marine Parade. The real truth was that while Charles was pouring words of tenderness and love into the ears of Perdita, she suddenly raised her eyes, and was horror-struck at beholding the countenances—too well-known countenances—of Captain Phinnikin and Lieutenant Pink. For their regiment had been stationed at Sydney; and those two officers had enjoyed the favours of the beautiful and voluptuous Perdita. She saw that she was recognised; and for a moment the chances were equal whether she should sink beneath the blow, as if struck by a thunder-bolt—or whether she should recover her presence of mind. The latter alternative favoured her on this occasion; and her sophistry, her demonstrations of tenderness, and the horror which she expressed at the idea of a duel, succeeded in completely pacifying her lover.

CHAPTER CXLV.

A MYSTERIOUS OCCURRENCE.—THE JOURNEY CONTINUED.

Our travellers rose early in the morning; for the French mail steamer, *Le Courier*, was to start for Calais at nine o'clock.

Breakfast over, Charles Hatfield and Perdita walked down to the pier at twenty minutes to nine—Mrs. Fitzhardinge, who was determined to make herself as busy and also as necessary as possible, remaining behind to see that the baggage was safely consigned to the porter in readiness to convey it.

The weather was delightful; and the fresh sea breeze, with its saline flavour, seemed to waft invigorating influences upon its wing. Charles and his beloved were in high spirits; although Perdita threw ever and anon an anxious glance around, to assure herself that the dreaded officers, who had caused her so much alarm on the preceding evening, were not near to renew that terror. Every thing was satisfactory in this respect; and never had the heart of the young woman been more elate, than when she stepped upon the deck of the gallant steamer, which was already puffing off its fleecy vapour with a snorting noise, as if it were a steed impatient of delay.

Seating themselves upon a bench, Charles and Perdita were soon absorbed in a conversation of a tender nature; and, forgetful of every thing save the topic of their discourse, they noticed not the lapse of

time until they happened to perceive the captain standing on one of the paddle-coxes, and heard the orders which he gave to the busy French sailors.

These symptoms of immediate departure instantaneously aroused the attention of Charles and Perdita to the fact that Mrs. Fitzhardinge had not joined them.

"Where is my mother?" demanded the latter, embracing with a rapid glance the entire range of the deck, and unable to discover the object of her search amongst the passengers scattered about the vessel.

"Wait here one moment, dearest—and I will see," said Charles; and he hastened forward, thinking that perhaps the funnel might conceal the old woman from their view.

But she was not to be found; although a glance at the piles of baggage in the immediate vicinity of the chimney showed him his companions' boxes, together with a portmanteau of necessities which he had purchased for himself on the preceding evening.

Yes: there was the baggage—but where was Mrs. Fitzhardinge?

What could have become of her?

Perhaps she had descended to the cabin.

This idea seemed probable; and Charles was about to hurry back to the bench where he had left Perdita, when she joined him, saying, "I have been into the cabin; and my mother is not there."

Before Charles had time to make any reply, a porter in his white frock approached him, and, touching his hat, said, "Please, sir, are these your things?"—pointing to the boxes.

"Yes," answered Hatfield: "but where is the lady who was giving you instructions about them when we left the hotel?"

"Please, sir, she came after me as far as the beginning of the pier," returned the porter; "and there, as I happened to look round, I saw her speaking to two men. I went on—looked round again, and could see nothing more of her."

"This is most extraordinary!" exclaimed Hatfield.

"I cannot comprehend it," observed Perdita: then, suddenly struck by the idea that Charles might propose to land and search after the old woman, she added hastily, "But we need not alarm ourselves: if any thing has happened to detain my mother a short time, she will doubtless follow us by the next boat."

At this moment the huge paddle-wheels began to turn—Charles hastily tossed the porter half-a-crown—and the man leapt on the pier in company with several others of his own calling,—while the steamer moved away with stately steadiness of pace.

Perdita and Charles Hatfield paced the deck, arm in arm, and conversing on the unaccountable disappearance of Mrs. Fitzhardinge. The latter could conjecture no possible key to the mystery: nor did Perdita offer any suggestive clue—although she thought it probable that her mother, having lost her despotic authority, had withdrawn, in a moment of ill-temper, from the company of those whom she could not hope to reduce to the condition of slaves. But the young woman said to herself, "She will soon repent of her folly and rejoin us;"—while to Charles she expressed an uneasiness and an apprehension lest any accident should have befallen her mother.

On sped the steamer: the harbour is cleared—and now she enters upon the expanse of green water, over which she walks "like a thing of life,"—the huge paddles raising a swell, which, covered with foam, marks the pathway of the gallant vessel.

On—on she went;—and now the white cliffs of Alton diminish and grow dim in the distance,—while, still far ahead, the coast of France, like a long brown streak in the horizon, appears in view!

And, oh! may that green sea never waft a hostile navy from one shore to the other;—may the peace which now subsists between the two greatest nations in the universe, remain undisturbed! Let France and England continue rivals,—not in the art of war,—but in the means of developing every element of civilisation and progress. Such a striving—such a race between the two, will be glorious indeed; and the whole world will experience the benefit.

Shame, then, to those alarmists who are now endeavouring to spread terror and dismay throughout the British Islands, by their calculations of the facility with which the French may invade us, and by their predictions of the consequences of such an invasion.

Well aware are we that were France to entertain the project, its realization would be easy;—for with our navy dispersed over the world, our coast-defences so few and far-between, and our totally insufficient army, we have no means of resisting an invading force of eighty or a hundred thousand men so admirably disciplined as the soldiers of France.

But neither Louis-Philippe nor his Government entertains the remotest idea of disturbing the peace of the world;—and it is madness—it is wickedness on the part of the public journals and of pamphleteers to write for the very purpose of creating an impression that an invasion by the French is imminent.

A terrible panic has been raised throughout the length and breadth of the land;—and with sorrow do we record the fact that the DUKE OF WELLINGTON has placed himself at the head of the alarmists!

To consummate the folly, all that is now required is—what?

To give Prince Albert the command of the Army!

—Or rather, O Englishmen! does not the apprehension of danger from an invasion by a foreign power lay bare, in all its nakedness, the monstrous folly—the astounding absurdity of suddenly elevating that young and inexperienced man to the rank of a Field-Marshal?

A Field-Marshal, who has never smelt powder save in the heartless, inhuman cruelty of a *battue* of game,—and who has never in his life seen a shot fired in anger!

England does not require such a Drawing-Room Field-Marshal: she wants a Captain-General who, if need be, can compete with such a man as Bugeaud.

But where will Royal Folly stop?—and when will any statesman have the courage to resist the childish caprices of the Queen?

In the same newspapers which are constantly telling us that the French meditate an invasion—that if the Cuirassiers enter London on the east, the best thing the Horse-Guards can do, will be to march out on the west—that the conquerors will be sure to levy contributions upon us, demand the settlement of old scores, strip us of our colonies, and humiliate us in every way,—in the very same journals which tell us all this, we read that the *Queen is anxious for Prince Albert to become Commander-in-Chief, the Duke of Wellington retiring to make room for him!*

Merciful heavens! is such a monstrous absurdity to be consummated? Is that grey-headed veteran, who won the field of Waterloo, to be superseded by a mere boy? Much as we have disliked the Duke of Wellington as a politician, yet we have felt proud of him as our

national hero;—and no words can convey an idea of the disgust with which we perused the paragraph intimating that this mighty warrior was to be put upon the shelf, to make way for a Prince who knows no more of military matters than he does of the hieroglyphics on the Pyramids of Egypt.

If the Duke be desirous of withdrawing into private life, let him be succeeded by some great Captain who knows what hard blows in the field are;—let his place be supplied by one of his own companions-in-arms.

Have we none of the heroes of the Peninsular battles still alive?—have we no names rendered glorious by victories achieved on the banks of the Sutlej?

It would be an insult the most glaring—the most flagrant, to all the illustrious chieftains alluded to, were a young man who never saw an angry shot fired, to be placed in authority over their heads! Already have the great warriors of England been sufficiently humiliated by the elevation of that young man to the rank of Field-Marshal:—but really if the English Court be allowed to “play at soldiers” in this disgraceful manner, it is no wonder that such men as the Duke of Wellington should look with apprehension at the consequences of a French invasion.

Prince Albert may be very resolute and very determined in worrying a poor otter with his dogs,—or he may be desperately brave in firing volleys of small shot upon harmless birds: but as for his capacity or his courage to lead an army—the idea is ridiculous!

The English people have not gone stark, staring mad—even if some few of their rulers have: and most sincerely do we hope that, if the attempt to raise Prince Albert to the post of Commander-in-Chief be persisted in, the country will oppose it by all moral and legal means,—by memorial, petition, and remonstrance,—by public meetings and the omnipotent voice of the public press,—in fine, by an universal agitation such as that which knocked down the Corn-Laws!

For the consummation of so astounding an absurdity will prove the ruin of the British Army!

Surely it is not in civilised England, and in the middle of the nineteenth century, that Royalty is to play its fantastic tricks, and use all our grandest institutions as playthings? If so, we shall have the Prince of Wales created an Admiral very shortly, and Dr. Howley may resign the Archbishopric of Canterbury to little Prince Ernest Alfred. And why not? Such appointments would be quite as rational as that of Prince Albert to the post of Commander-in-Chief.

Let not our readers suppose that we seek to bring Princes into ridicule: they have a right to be Princes, if the people are foolish enough to let them; but when they make themselves ridiculous by grasping at offices for which they are totally unfitted, it is time for us to speak out.

We are inspired by no awe and entertain no solemn terror in dealing with Royalty: for, after all, royal persons are only human creatures, as well as we—and they seldom possess the good feelings and sterling qualities which are to be found in honest, hard-working, enlightened mechanics.

After a most agreeable voyage of two hours and a half, the French steam-packet entered Calais harbour.

Charles and Perdita proceeded to Dessin's Hotel; and there they determined to wait at least a few hours until the arrival of an English steamer, which was

to leave Dover about a couple of hours later than *Le Courier*.

During this interval Charles bethought himself that, should Mrs. Fitzhardinge not join them in the course of the day, Perdita and himself would be compelled to continue their journey to Paris; and, with a due sense of delicacy towards her who was to become his wife, he saw the impropriety of their travelling alone together. He accordingly intimated to Perdita the necessity of procuring for her a lady's-maid without delay; and though she would have much preferred that herself and lover should be the sole occupants of the interior of the post-chaise, she nevertheless comprehended that the expression of such a wish on her part would give him but a poor idea of her modesty. She therefore assented to his proposal with apparent cheerfulness, and thanked him for his kind consideration.

By the agency of Madame Dessin, the landlady of the hotel, a French lady's-maid, who understood English, was speedily obtained and engaged; and Perdita was now by no means displeased to find herself elevated to the position of a woman of some consequence. She, who but a short time before had entered London in a butcher's cart and clad in the meanest apparel, was now provided with a special attendant and could choose dresses of the latest fashion and the costliest material.

The lady's-maid was a pretty young woman of about three and twenty, with fine hair and eyes, good teeth, and a beautiful figure; and her attire was of the most tasteful, though quiet and unassuming, description. Her manners were very agreeable, and would be termed lady-like in this country: but, beneath a modest and innocent-looking exterior, she concealed a disposition for intrigue and no small amount of subtlety. At the same time, Rosalie—for that was her name—would not for the world seek to lead a virtuous mistress astray; and to such virtuous mistress she would doubtless prove an excellent, faithful, and trust-worthy servant. But should she have to deal with a mistress given to gallantry, then Rosalie would cheerfully exercise all her arts of duplicity—all her little cunning machinations—and all her aptitude for the management of an intrigue, and would take delight in enabling her lady to deceive a husband or a lover.

Such was the young person who now became Perdita's attendant: but it must be observed that the character of Rosalie, as far as it was known to the landlord of the hotel, was unimpeachable:—that is to say, she bore the reputation of honesty, cleanliness, a perfect knowledge of her duties—in fine, all those qualifications which are sought and required in an upper servant of her description.

Having waited until the arrival of the English packet, and finding that Mrs. Fitzhardinge did not make her appearance, Charles, to whom her absence was unaccountable and bewildering to a degree, ordered the post-chaise to be got ready; and, while this was being done, he proceeded with Perdita to the British Consul's to obtain passports. Finally, at about five o'clock in the afternoon, our travellers took their departure from Dessin's Hotel in a chaise and four—Rosalie occupying a seat inside, for the sake of appearances.

Oh! had Charles Hatfield known that the young woman—his intended bride—for whose reputation he manifested so much delicate care,—had he known that she was so thoroughly polluted in body and mind,—

could he have heard the history which the two officers at Dover might have told of her, had they chosen—he would have been shocked and horrified,—he would have spurned her from him—and all his ardent, enthusiastic love, amounting to an adoration and a worship, would have changed into feelings of abhorrence, loathing, and hate.

But he believed her to be pure and virtuous,—possessing some strange, wayward, and eccentric notions, it is true,—and yet endowed with a spirit so plastic and ductile as to yield willingly to good counsel and to be ready to sacrifice any peculiarity of opinion to the man whom she loved.

It is likewise true that he remembered how she had permitted him, in moments of impassioned tenderness, to toy with her—to press her glowing bosom—to glue his lips to her's, as if she herself would on those occasions accord even more: but he likewise recollected how invariably she started from his arms—withdrew herself from his embrace—and manifested a suddenly resuscitated presence of mind, when he had grown too bold and, maddened with desire, had sought the last favour which a woman, in amorous dalliance, can bestow. He therefore reasoned that, although her naturally warm temperament had led her to bestow upon him such unequivocal proofs of her love, yet that a virgin pride and a maiden's prudence had enabled her in every instance to triumph over temptation;—and this belief enhanced his profound admiration of her character.

But from the moment that Charles had first beheld Perdita, his brain had been in an incessant state of excitement,—an intoxication, an elysian delirium which made Perdita an angel of beauty and almost of excellence in his eyes:—and those fervent caresses which he had been permitted to bestow upon her, and those slight foretastes of the most voluptuous enjoyments which he had been allowed to snatch, had only tended to sustain that excitement—increase the dreamy delights of that intoxication—and enhance the bliss of that continuous delirium.

Then, in addition to the fascinating influence of the syren—in addition to the enthralling witchery which her charms, her arts, her conversation, and the silver sounds of her dulcet voice exercised over him,—were his ambitious hopes, his soaring aspirations!

All these circumstances had combined to unsettle, if not altogether change, in an incredibly short space, a disposition naturally good—a mind naturally energetic and powerful: and then those unhappy scenes with his father, when neither fully understood the meaning and drift of the other's observations, had aided to produce an excitement which was thus hurrying the young man along apparently to his utter ruin!

Unless, indeed, some good angel should yet intervene, ere it be too late—

But we must not anticipate

On the contrary, let us return, from this partial though not unnecessary digression, to the thread of our narrative,—so that we may all the sooner be enabled to bring our readers back to that metropolis—that mighty London, of which we have still so many Mysteries to unfold!

The travellers pursued their journey all night, Charles being anxious to reach the French capital with the least possible delay, and Perdita seconding him fully in the wish.

Let us therefore succinctly state that in the morning they breakfasted at Amiens—in the afternoon they

dined at Beauvais—and at ten o'clock in the evening they entered the splendid city of Paris.

Did our limits and the nature of the tale permit us, we would here gladly pause for a few minutes to describe that peerless capital which we know and love so well: but this may not be;—and we therefore hasten to state that Charles and Perdita, attended by Rosalie, proceeded to a respectable family hotel, where they hired a handsome suite of apartments.

And now for an important event in this section of our narrative,—an event which nevertheless may be related in a few words!

For, at eleven o'clock on the morning following their arrival in Paris, *Charles Hatfield, claiming to be Viscount Marston, and Perdita Fitzhardinge were united in the bonds of matrimony, at the British Ambassador's Chapel in the Rue Saint Honoré, and by the Chaplain to the Embassy.*

CHAPTER CXLVI.

TWO UNPLEASANT LODGERS.

IN the meantime certain little incidents had occurred in London, which we must faithfully chronicle before we proceed with the adventures of the newly married couple,—adventures, which, could Charles have possibly foreseen—

But we were for a moment oblivious of the scenes that require our attention in London, and which took place while Charles Hatfield and Perdita were as yet on their way to Paris.

Charterhouse Square—situate between Aldersgate Street and St. John Street (Smithfield)—has a mournful, gloomy, and sombre appearance, which even the green foliage in the circular enclosure cannot materially relieve. The houses are for the most part of antiquated structure and dingy hue—the windows and front-doors are small—and, pass by them when you will, you never behold a human countenance at any one of the casements. The curtains and the blinds,—and, in the winter time, glimpses of the fires burning in the parlours,—these are, to a certain extent, symptoms that the houses are tenanted: but no farther signs of the fact can be discovered. Often and often as we have passed through that Square, we never beheld a soul coming out of, nor going into, any one of the gloomy abodes: we have observed a baker's boy and a butcher's ditto hurrying rapidly round—but never could satisfy ourselves that either of them had any particular business there, for they did not knock at a single door;—and on one—and only one occasion—when we met a two-penny post-man in the Square, he seemed to be as much astonished at finding himself in that quarter as we were to encounter him there. As for the beadle—his occupation seems to consist of lounging about, switching a cane, strolling into the Fox and Anchor public-house, and chatting for half-an-hour at a time with the very sober-looking porter of the Charter House.

There is a something really solemn and awful in the silence of that Square,—not a silence and a repose which seem to afford relief to the mind and rest to the ear after escaping from the tremendous din of the crowded streets,—but a silence that strikes like a chill to the heart. Whence arises this sensation?—is it because, while traversing the Square, we are reminded that in the vast cloistral building to the north

are pent up eighty old men—the Poor Brothers of the Charter House,—eighty denizens of a Protestant Monastery in the very heart of civilised London,—eighty worn-out and decrepid persons who drag out the wretched remnant of their lives beneath the iron sway of a crushing ecclesiastical discipline! Does the silence of the Square borrow its solemnity from that far more awful silence which reigns within the Charter House itself,—a silence so awe-inspiring—so dead—so tomb-like, that even in the noon of a hot summer-day, the visitor shudders with a cold feeling creeping over him as he crosses the cloistral enclosure!

The reader will probably remember that, when Mr. Bubbleton Styles had propounded his grand Railway scheme to Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Frank Curtis, he gave each of those gentlemen a ten-pound note, desiring them to take respectable lodgings, and refer, if necessary, to him. We know not precisely how it happened that the gallant officer and his friend should have selected Charterhouse Square as the place most likely to suit them with regard to apartments; but thither they assuredly did repair—and in that gloomy quarter did they hire three rooms: namely, a parlour on the first floor, and two bed-chambers on the second. The landlady of the house was a widow; and, having some small pittance in the shape of regular income, eked out by letting a portion of her abode. She was an elderly woman—tall, starch, and prim—and very particular in obtaining good references—or, at least, what she considered to be good ones—respecting any applicants for her apartments; and therefore, previously to admitting Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Frank Curtis into her house, she had sought all possible information concerning them at the hands of Mr. Styles. His account was satisfactory, and the two gentlemen were thereupon duly installed in their lodgings at Mrs. Rudd's, Charterhouse Square.

The first two or three days passed comfortably enough, because the captain and Frank, having ready money in their pockets, took their dinner and supper—aye, and their grog too—at some convenient tavern,—troubling Mrs. Rudd only in reference to their breakfast, which she cheerfully prepared for them, because she thereby obtained whole and sole controul over their groceries. She was a very pious woman, and attended a Methodist Chapel regularly every Sunday; but being, as she often expressed herself, “a lone widow,” she thought there was no harm in using her lodgers' tea, sugar, and butter for her own repasts. “Heaven was very good to her,” she would often tell her neighbours, “and enabled her to make the most of her little means:” she might have added—“and of her lodgers' also.”

The captain and Frank, however, soon began to find that their evening entertainments at the tavern were very expensive; and, as they could not again draw upon Mr. Styles for some time—all his resources being required for the promotion of the railway—they resolved to economise. The best method of carrying this object into effect, was to take their dinner, supper and potec at home; and Mrs. Rudd, on being sounded in respect to the plan, willingly assented—for the excellent woman felt assured that her lodgers would not miss a slice or two off a cold joint any more than they noticed the marvellous disappearance of their groceries. So the captain and his friend became more domestic; and as Frank did not get particularly drunk on the two first evenings, Mrs. Rudd had no complaints to make.

But at last she began to suspect that she had some

ground for doubting the steadiness of her lodgers. It was on a Sunday evening, and the worthy woman had just returned from chapel, where she had heard a most refreshing and savoury discourse by the Reverend Mr. Flummery,—when, on crossing the threshold of the house door, and while still ruminating on the truly Christian manner in which the eloquent minister had promised hell-flames to all heathens,—she was suddenly startled by hearing a terrific noise proceeding from up-stairs.

She paused—and listened!

Yes: the sound *did* emanate from above; and most strange sounds they were, too. Deeply disgusted—nay, profoundly shocked at this desecration of the Sabbath, Mrs. Rudd crept up stairs; and the nearer she drew to the parlour-door, the more convinced did she become that Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Curtis were fighting a single combat with the shovel and poker. The conflict was, however, only in fun: for the clash of the fire-irons was accompanied by tremendous shouts of laughter, and such ejaculations as these:—"There, be Jasus! I have ye again, Frank! Blood and thunther, keep up your guar-r-d, man! Now, would ye be afther a feint? Be the powers! and ye can't touch me at all, at all! Hit hard, me friend—niver mind the damned ould poker-r-r—the ould woman is at chapel!"

Mrs. Rudd was astounded—stupefied. Was it possible that these were the lodgers whom Mr. Styles—a respectable "City man"—had recommended as the very patterns of quietness and steadiness? Why, if she had let her rooms to two Bedlamites, things could not have been worse! She was positively afraid to go in to remonstrate; and, having recovered the use of those limbs which wonder had for several minutes paralysed, she hurried down stairs to consider what was best to be done, while supping off her ricketty lodgers' cold joint.

That same night Frank Curtis got so gloriously inebriated, that he threw up his bed-room window and treated the whole Square to a specimen of his vocal powers—singing some favourite Bacchanalian song, and introducing the most terrific yells by way of variations. The captain, who had also imbibed a little too much, soon after threw up *his* window, and exerted all the powers of *his* lungs in chorus with his friend; so that the deep, solemn, and awe-inspiring silence of Charterhouse Square was broken in a fashion that seemed to surprise the very echoes themselves. Without any figure of speech, it is certain that the inhabitants were surprised; for their night, usually passed in such death-like tranquillity, was unexpectedly and suddenly "made hideous;" and several nervous old ladies, dwelling in the neighbourhood, fancied that the frightful yells were warnings of fire, and went off into strong hysterics.

Vainly did Mrs. Rudd knock first at the captain's door—then at Frank's: they heard her not—or, if they did, took no heed of her remonstrances;—and when the beadle, who had been aroused from his bed, came and thundered at the front-door, the two lodgers simultaneously emptied their water-pitchers on his head. Then, satisfied with this exploit, they closed their windows and retired to rest.

When they descended to their parlour to breakfast in the morning, Mrs. Rudd acquainted them, in a tone evincing the most violent concentration of rage, that she could not possibly think of harbouring Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Curtis any longer. But, to her amazement, they both swore that they were per-

fectly innocent of the disturbance of the previous night,—alleging that they themselves were as much annoyed by the row as the landlady herself. Mrs. Rudd could scarcely believe her ears: had she been dreaming? No: the noise had really taken place—for her lodgers admitted that they had heard it—though, to use a common phrase, they swore "eyes and limbs" that they had not made it. However, she gave them a week's warning, and then calmly reminded them that a week's rent was already due; whereupon Captain O'Blunderbuss flew into a terrific rage at the idea of "the maneness of the woman in spaking of such a thrifle!" Mrs. Rudd was frightened, and turned in an appealing manner to Mr. Frank Curtis, who declared point blank that the captain was cashier, and that she must draw upon him: but, finding that the gallant officer was a cashier without cash, Mrs. Rudd was compelled to retire—muttering something about her being "a lone widow," and intimating a hope that the two weeks' rent would be paid "all in a lump" on the following Monday morning.

The captain and Mr. Curtis now completely threw off the mask. They no longer affected even to be "steady, quiet men of regular habits," as Mr. Styles had represented them; but they drank poteen "till all was blue," as Frank Curtis said—or, in the language of the gallant officer, "till they couldn't see a hole through a lath-er." The disturbances they created at night were hideous; and poor Mrs. Rudd received from all her neighbours the most positive threats that they would indict her house as a nuisance. At last, in the depth of her despair, she had recourse to that excellent man, the Reverend Mr. Flummery; and the Reverend Mr. Flummery, having heard her sad tale, undertook to go in person and remonstrate with "these men of Belial."

Accordingly, one afternoon, just as the captain and Frank had finished a couple of bottles of stout by way of giving themselves an appetite for dinner, they were somewhat surprised when the parlour-door was thrown open, and in walked a short, podgy, red-faced man, dressed in deep black. Still more amazed were they when he announced himself as the Reverend Emanuel Flummery, and stated that he had come to remonstrate with them on their behaviour towards "a lone widow." The captain, winking at Curtis, desired the minister to be seated, and proposed to discuss the business over another bottle of stout. His reverence thought there was something so affable in the offer, that it would be churlish to refuse it; and he accordingly gave his assent. The stout was produced; and Mr. Flummery, being thirsty and hot, enjoyed it excessively.

He then began a long remon-trance with the two gentlemen—the gist of which was that Mrs. Rudd would be very much obliged to them if they would pay their rent and remove to other lodgings. The captain and Frank pretended to listen with attention; and the reverend minister, finding them in such a tractable humour, as he supposed, did not choose to mar the harmony of the interview by declining a second bottle of stout. Talking had renewed his thirst—and, moreover, if there were one special beverage which the Reverend Emanuel Flummery loved more than another, it was Guinness's stout. Accordingly, he emptied his tumbler, and then continued his remon-trance and his representations, in which, however he was cut short by a sudden pain in the stomach—doubtless produced by the effervescent malt liquor. The captain was prompt with a remedy; and Mr.



Flummery had swallowed a good dram of whiskey before an eye could twinkle thrice. Thus cheered, and finding the two gentlemen most docile and respectful, his reverence consented to partake of a hot glass of toddy with them, just to convince them that he was inclined to be friendly; and this one glass led to a second, and then Frank Curtis cunningly brewed him a third, while the reverend minister was expatiating upon the good qualities of Mrs. Rudd. In fine, Mr. Emanuel Flummery became so much disguised in liquor, that, when he took his leave, he swore the captain and Frank Curtis were two excellent gentlemen—begged them not to put themselves to any inconvenience in moving—and assured them that he would make it all right with the landlady.

Mrs. Rudd, however, was mightily shocked when she beheld the condition in which the reverend gentleman presented himself at her own parlour-door; and she could indeed scarcely believe her eyes. But when, after hiccupping out some unintelligible words, that self-same reverend gentleman—the pastor of an admiring flock, and whose sermons were so refreshing and so savoury,—when *he*,—the individual whom she had looked upon as the essence of human perfection,—when *he*, we say, cast his arms around

her neck and administered to her somewhat wrinkled cheeks a hearty smack,—*then*, what did she do? Why—she put up with the affront—doubtless to save the reputation of the minister;—and, perhaps with the same charitable desire to avoid the scandal of an exposure; she permitted him to repeat his caresses as often as he chose during the half-hour that he remained in her company. She even made him some tea, which materially tendered to sober him; and, when he had at length taken his departure, she muttered several times to herself, “Well—after all, this saint of a man is mere flesh and blood like any other!”

But when Mrs. Rudd’s more pleasurable reflections had ceased—for pleasurable they certainly were, both during the reverend gentleman’s presence and for a short time after the door had closed behind him,—she remembered that her disagreeable lodgers were still in the house, notwithstanding the remonstrances which, according to his statement to the widow, the pious minister had most eloquently addressed to them. And that they were still in the dwelling, she was very soon made to understand;—for the obstreperous behaviour of those “dreadful men,” to use Mrs. Rudd’s own

words, recommenced in the form of the most hearty peals of laughter—and the clashing of the fire-irons—and the stamping of feet, as if the two gentlemen were mad.

"They have begun their booze," said Mrs. Rudd to herself, looking up in despair at the ceiling, as if she thought the captain and his friend must inevitably come through upon her devoted head. "But never mind!" she suddenly exclaimed aloud, as a thought—a very bright thought struck her: "I will put up with it for this once—and to-morrow—to-morrow——"

Here Mrs. Rudd stopped short; for she would not even trust the empty air with the lucid idea which had struck her.

We may however inform our readers that this said idea was nothing more nor less than to lock out the two gentlemen when they went for their usual walk on the morrow.

Tranquillised by the excellence of the scheme, Mrs. Rudd refreshed herself with a small drop of brandy, and then spread her huge Bible open on the table before her—not to read it, but merely because "it looked pious-like," as she thought, if any of her neighbours should happen to drop in. For Mrs. Rudd delighted in the reputation for sanctity which she enjoyed amongst her acquaintances in general, and the frequenters of the reverend gentleman's chapel in particular.

Let us now return to Mr. Frank Curtis and Captain O'Blunderbuss, who, as the landlady rightly concluded, were enjoying themselves in their own peculiar fashion up-stairs.

Having partaken of a cold joint, and the slipshod girl of the house having provided them with a jug of hot water, the two gentlemen commenced the evening's orgie. The whiskey-punch which they brewed was of that kind which is libellously alleged to be peculiarly affected by ladies—namely, "hot, strong, and plenty of it;"—and, under its influence, they soon manifested their wonted exuberance of spirits. First, Captain O'Blunderbuss would insist upon giving Frank a lesson with the broadsword—the one using the poker, and the other the shovel;—and every time the gallant officer thrust his friend in the ribs, a hearty shout of laughter burst from their lips—for they considered it prime fun.

When they were tired of this amusement, they resumed their seats—replenished their glasses—and chatted on divers matters interesting to themselves. Presently Frank started up, and leapt over a chair in order to show his agility, although he had grown somewhat stout of late years;—and as he acquitted himself in a clumsy manner, the captain volunteered to teach him how to do it. But the gallant officer only tumbled over the chair, causing a tremendous split in his trousers—an accident at which they nevertheless both laughed more heartily than ever.

"Be Jassus!" cried the captain, "and it's the only pair of unmentionables that I possess! But never mind: I'll be after telling the gal to take them round to the tailor's the first thing in the morning; and so I'll take my breakfast in bed, Frank. They'll soon be sent home again."

"Let's see? we've got to meet Styles to-morrow at three in the afternoon," said Curtis; "and, by Jove! we must make him come down with the dust."

"Be the power-rs! and you're right, my frind!" exclaimed the captain. "It's eighteen-pence that's left in my pocket at this prisint spaking——"

"And nothing at all in mine," interrupted Frank,

both his hands diving at the same time down into the depths of the empty conveniences alluded to. "Deuce take this railway affair! It gets on precious slow. I remember when I was in Paris two or three-and-twenty years ago, they were making a new path-way through my friend the Archbishop's estate at Fontainebleau; and if his Grace didn't go and swear at the men all day long, they never would have got on with it."

"Be the power-rs! if it's a thrifle of swearing that would make Misther Styles push a-head," said the gallant officer, "I'm the boy to help him on with that same."

"You see there's been what they call a tightness in the Money-Market lately," observed Frank: "at least, that's what Styles told me the other day——"

"And it's an infer-r-nal tightness that's got hould of our Money-Market, my frind," interrupted the captain. "Be Jassus! there's the potheen bottle empty—and no tick at the public!"

"You've got eighteen-pence in your pocket, captain," suggested Curtis.

"Right, me boy!"—and he rang the bell furiously.

The slipshod girl answered the summons, and was forthwith despatched for a supply of whiskey at the wine-vaults which the lodgers honoured with their custom.

"Now we're altogether aground," said Curtis, after a pause which had followed the departure of the servant. "But we've every thing necessary in the house for to-morrow morning's breakfast, except the milk——"

"And bar-r-ring my breeches, yo spalpeen!" cried the captain. "They must be immediately menthed, any how."

"Oh! the tailor won't think of asking for the money when he brings them home," said Curtis, then, beholding the comical expression of his friend's countenance, which was elongated with sore misgivings respecting the amount of confidence the snip might choose to put in his honour, Frank burst out into a tremendous fit of laughter.

"Arrah! and be Jassus! and it's all mighty fine for you, Misther Curtis, to make a damned fool of yourself in that fashion," exclaimed Captain O'Blunderbuss, becoming as red as a turkey-cock; "but I can assure ye that it's no joking matter for me to contemplate the prospect of lying in bed for a week or two till I get my breeches back again. And now, if you're not aither houlding your tongue, Frank, I'll tip ye a small rap on the head with the poker—by the howly poker-r, I will!"

"Don't get into a rage, captain," said Curtis, putting a bridle upon his mirth in consequence of the threat just held out—a threat which he knew his amiable friend was perfectly capable of putting into force. "I will go out the first thing in the morning and see Styles—and I have no doubt he will give me some money. I shall be back again by the time the tailor comes home with—with——"

"The unmentionables!" vociferated the captain, his wrath reviving as he saw that his friend was once more on the point of giving vent to a hearty exclamation. "But here's the gal coming up stairs with the potheen; and so we'll be aither enjoying ourselves for the prisint, and think of the tightness of the Money-Mar-r-cket in the morning."

"Well, what the deuce has made you so long?" demanded Frank Curtis, as the slipshod domestic entered the room.

"Long, sir!" echoed the girl, as if in surprise. "Lor, sir—I ain't been a minit!"

"Not a minute!" cried Frank, who always bullied servants—when they were n't footmen who could knock him down for his impudence: "I tell you, you've been more than a quarter of an hour."

"Well, sir—and if so be I have," said the girl, suddenly recollecting something which had occurred to hinder her on her errand, "it was because as I went out of the street-door a man come up and asked me if so be as Mr. Smith lived here. 'No,' says I: 'he don't.'—'Well, then,' says the man, 'Mr. Brown does.'—'No, he don't, though,' I says, says I; 'nor yet Mr. Jones, nor Mr. Noakes neether.'—'Well, who does live here, then?' says the man; and as I thought it would teach him not to be so precious knowing another time, I out and told him slap as how two gentlemen lived here as was named Blunderbuss—leastways, O'Blunderbuss, and Curtis."

"The devil you did!" ejaculated the two lodgers as it were in the same breath, and exchanging significant glances which expressed the same apprehension.

"To be sure I did, sir," responded the girl, not perceiving the alarm which she had created in the minds of the gentlemen, but rather attributing their excited ejaculations to an approval of her conduct: "for I thinks to myself, thinks I, 'Now, my fine feller, you'll believe that there's no Smiths or Browns here; and you won't be quite so positive another time.'"

"Well—and what did the man say?" demanded Frank Curtis, darting another uneasy glance at his friend.

"He only said 'Oh!' and went away," returned the girl; "and that's what kept me a little in going—"

"What sort of a looking fellow was he?" asked Curtis.

"He warn't a gentleman, sir—and he smelt horrible of drink," said the domestic.

"But what should you take him for?" demanded Frank, impatiently.

"A thief, sir," was the ingenuous response.

"Be Jusus! and thin it's a shiriff's —" ejaculated Captain O'Blunderbuss, starting in his chair; but, instantly stopping short ere he completed the sentence, he added in a few moments and in a less excited tone, "You may go down stairs, my dear; and if any one comes and asks for Mither Frank Cur-r-tis or Captain O'Bluntherbuss, ye must deny us, mind—or I'll be afther skinning ye alive!"

"Lor, sir!" cried the girl; and, horrified by the dreadful threat, she hastened from the room as if the individual who had uttered the menace were preparing to carry it into execution.

For some few minutes after she had taken her departure, Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Curtis sate eyeing each other in silence,—the same idea evidently occupying both—and both fearful to express it; as if to give utterance to the thought were positively to meet the dreaded misfortune half-way.

"Well," exclaimed Curtis, at length, "and what do you think of that?"

"Be Jusus! and it's what do *you* think of it?" cried the captain.

"For my part I think it's Rumrigg and Kaysay the lawyers, who've found out where we are, and mean to take us on that cursed cognovit we gave them last Christmas for the discounter's affair," said Mr. Curtis, who, having now fully expressed his fears, no longer hesitated to look particularly blank upon the matter.

"Faith! and that same's my opinion also," exclaimed the gallant officer: then, grasping the poker very tight in his hand, he said, "But if the thund'ring villains of shiriff's-officers crape into this house, it's myself that'll sind 'em out again with a flay in their ear. So do n't make yourself unhappy at all, at all, my frind; but let's dhrink bad luck to the bastes of the airth!"

"With all my heart," cried Frank, brewing for himself a strong glass of toddy. "The only thing is—"

"Is what?" demanded the captain, suddenly desisting from his occupation of mixing a tumbler of grog for himself, and fixing his eyes sternly upon his friend.

"The breeches," was the laconic answer.

"Ah! now—and can't ye be asy about those same unmintionables?" cried the gallant officer. "I suspected it was afther them ye was harping again and again. It'll become a sore subject in time, Frank. So dhrink—and bad luck to the inexpressibles."

And the two gentlemen did drink, until the bottle was empty, when they retired to rest—the captain having previously informed the servant-girl that he should leave his trousers outside his chamber door, and that she must take them round to the tailor the very first thing in the morning, with instructions for him to mend and return them as speedily as possible.

CHAPTER CXLVII.

THE CAPTAIN'S LUDICROUS ADVENTURE.

MR. CURTIS arose at a very early hour—at least for him,—it being only eight o'clock when he sallied forth with the intention of seeking Mr. Bubbleton Styles, on whose purse he contemplated as deep an inroad as that gentleman's circumstances would permit.

But before he quitted the house, he partook of breakfast, and likewise carried in some tea and toast to his friend the captain, who was compelled, "under painful circumstances," as Frank observed, to keep his bed for an hour or two. The gallant officer charged his companion and ally to return without delay—the prudence of shifting their quarters as soon as convenient, being strongly suggested by the enquiries instituted regarding them on the preceding evening.

Having disposed of his breakfast, Captain O'Blunderbuss turned himself round in his bed and took a nap—in which luxurious state of light and dreamy repose he remained for upwards of an hour, when he was suddenly awakened by a low, sneaking, suspicious kind of double knock at the street-door.

He started up in bed; and, as he hastily collected his scattered ideas, the affair of Rumrigg and Kaysay flashed to his mind.

Leaping from his couch as a chesnut bounces from a shovel on the fire, Captain O'Blunderbuss pulled on his stockings, thrust his feet into his slippers, and stole out upon the landing, where he held his breath and listened attentively.

At that very instant the servant-girl, who invariably kept people waiting at the door as long as possible, answered the summons; and the captain overheard the following colloquy.

"Is the genelman at home, my dear?" asked a rough, harsh, grating voice.

"Oh! you're the one that stopped and spoke to me last evening," responded the girl.

"Just so: but it was o'ny to make a few civil enquiries consarnin your missus's lodgers. I s'pose they're at home; and so me and my friend will just walk up, my dear—'cause our business is partickler."

"Well, then, it ain't of no use to go up now," said the servant-girl: "for Mr. Curtis has gone out, and the captain is n't out of bed—leastways, he has n't left his room yet; and he brekfasted there."

"Never mind, my dear," persisted the man with the hoarse voice: "we'll just walk up and pay our respects to the captain, who is a very nice genelman no doubt."

From this conversation the gallant officer learnt that there were *two* persons enquiring for him, although *one* only appeared to speak in the matter. His worst suspicions were confirmed: they were bailiffs, come to arrest him on the cognovit given jointly by himself and his inseparable friend Mr. Francis Curtis to those astute gentlemen, Messrs. Runrigg and Kaysay.

What was to be done? He must dress himself in all possible haste, and fight his way desperately out of the house!

This was his first idea.

But it was so easy to think of dressing—and so difficult to carry the scheme into execution: for, alas! the gallant officer's unmentionables were at the tailor's; and he knew that Frank possessed not a second pair!

What, then, was to be done?

Should he surrender himself into the hands of the officers, and be borne ignominiously to Whitecross Street? The thought was ridiculous with such a man as Captain O'Blunderbuss!

Locking his own door, and taking the key with him, he scud up to the top storey, and sought refuge in the bed-chamber of Mrs. Rudd, who, he felt assured, had gone out to market as usual—otherwise she would have been certain to emerge from her parlour below and join in the conversation which had taken place between the bailiffs and the servant-girl.

The captain's first thought, in thus flying to his landlady's bed-chamber, was merely to seek refuge there, and leave the officers to suppose that he had gone out. It struck him that they would knock at his door—would force open that door on not receiving any answer—and would then conclude that he really was not at home. In the meantime he should have leisure to decide upon the best means of ultimately avoiding the bailiffs altogether.

But scarcely had he entered Mrs. Rudd's room, when a new and truly magnificent idea suggested itself—or rather, was suggested by the fact that an open cupboard revealed the worthy landlady's best silk gown, while upon a chest of drawers stood the good woman's Sunday bonnet, to which she had been putting a new ribband that very morning before she went out. The bonnet, which was of fine straw and of a large shape, was provided with an ample blue gauze veil; for Mrs. Rudd liked to be smart on the Sabbath—if it were only to compete with her female neighbours who attended the "ministry" of the Reverend Emanuel Flummery.

The appearance of the two articles of dress just specified, determined the gallant officer how to act; and his arrangements were made with almost lightning speed.

The reader will recollect that he had no clothes at the moment to put off before he put others on—he having sought the landlady's room in his shirt, stockings, and slippers. To slip into the silk dress was therefore the work of an instant: to assume the

Leghorn bonnet was an affair accomplished with equal speed;—and to ransack the widow's drawers for a shawl was a matter scarcely occupying ten seconds. Then, drawing the veil in thick folds over his moustachioed and whiskered countenance with one hand, and grasping Mrs. Rudd's parasol in the other, Captain O'Blunderbuss took a hasty survey of himself in the glass, and was perfectly satisfied with the result.

We have before stated that Mrs. Rudd was very tall, starch, and prim; and the reader is aware that Captain O'Blunderbuss was no dwarf—neither was he particularly stout. Thus, although he certainly appeared a very colossal woman, he might still pass as one at a pinch—and surely need was never more pinching than on the present occasion. At all events he was resolved to make the attempt; and the exciting nature of the incident was just of the kind which he particularly relished—though, perhaps, he would rather have had the fun without the danger of the thing.

In the meantime he had not been in a state of ignorance of what was passing on the landing of the floor below; for the bailiffs, having ascended to that height, stopped at his own chamber door, at which they knocked. But receiving no answer, the one with the hoarse voice exclaimed, "Captain O'Blunderbuss, I've got a message for you very particklar from a friend of your'n."

Still there was no response; and the man, addressing himself to the servant-girl, asked her if she were sure that the captain was at home.

"I'm certain he is," was the reply; "because he's sent out his—his—trousers to be mended, and is lying a-bed till they come back."

"But may n't he have another pair?" demanded the bailiff.

"I do n't b'lieve he have," said the girl: "leastways, I never see more than one either on or off him."

"Then the captain is at home," growled the sheriff's officer; "and we must do our dooty, Tom."

These last words were evidently addressed by the speaker to his companion; and the captain comprehended that the forcing of the door would be the next step. Nor was he wrong in his conjecture;—for, before the servant girl could divine the intention of the two men, they had effected an entrance into the chamber which the gallant officer had only quitted three minutes previously.

The captain, who had been listening at the door of Mrs. Rudd's own bed-room, now partly descended the stairs, and again stood still to listen—his proceedings being conducted as noiselessly and cautiously as possible.

"Well—I'm blowed if he's here!" exclaimed the bailiff with the hoarse voice.

"No more than a cat," returned his companion.

"How's this, my dear?" continued the first speaker:

"have you been a-making fools on us?"

"No," answered the girl sharply: "I thought the captain was here—but he ain't. So I s'pose he's gone out without my hearing or seeing him. But now you've broke the lock of the door and must pay for it—or else missus will blow me up finely when she comes home from market."

"Then she is at market," said Captain O'Blunderbuss to himself, his hopes becoming more elated by the assurance thus conveyed to him through the servant-girl's remark to the bailiffs.

"Pay for it, indeed!" growled the one with the hoarse voice. "That won't suit our books neither

S'pose we fix the lock on agin in such a way that it won't be knowed as how we over busted the door open at all?"

"Well—do what you like; but make haste about it, 'cause missus is sure to come home in a minit or two—leastways if she's raly out; for I did n't see her go. But I s'pose she is—or else she'd have been down afore this to know what all the row's about."

"We'll see to it, my dear," observed the hoarse-speaking bailiff. "But I say, Tom—here's the captain's cap, and coat, and veskitt. Bless'd if I believe he's gone out arter all! Let's search t' other rooms: this gal is a-playing tricks with us."

"Come into Mr. Curtis's chamber and see," exclaimed the juvenile servant; and the captain heard the party pursuing their domiciliary visit in the quarter alluded to. "Well, now?" said the girl, with a derisive laugh: "is he there? Oh! ah! you may look under the bed! Why don't you search the drawers—or get up the chimney and look out on the tiles?"

"Don't be sarsy, my dear," growled the bailiff. "Come—here's a shillin' for you. Now tell us the truth—ain't the captain somewhere in the house?"

"Yes—I'm sure he be," returned the girl; "'cause his breeches is gone to be mended, and his coat and wescutt and cap is in his own room—and I know he ain't got two suits of clothes. Besides," she added, sinking her voice to a tone of mysterious confidence—though not so low as to be inaudible to the gallant officer on the stairs above, "his bluchers is down stairs to be blacked—and I'll swear he ain't got two pair of them."

"Then he is in the house," said the bailiff. "Now, Tom, I tell'ee what we must do. You stay here, and me and the gal will just toddle down stairs and look in the kitchen, and scullery, and sich-like places."

"Oh! but you must put the lock right first," exclaimed the girl; "for if missus—Lor! here she is!" added the affrighted servant, in a hurried whisper.

The fact was that the captain, by some awkward and unintentional movement, at that very instant rustled the silk gown loud enough for the sound to catch the ears of the girl and the bailiffs; and he was about to curse his folly, when, finding that all had suddenly become still on the floor below, it instantly struck him that the juvenile servant had imposed silence on the officers for fear her mistress should stop to enquire the cause of their presence and thereby notice the damaged lock.

He was perfectly correct in his conjecture; and, perceiving that the sudden stillness remained unbroken, he boldly descended the stairs—imitating as well as he could the measured walk of the sanctimonious landlady, and treading with feminine lightness in his slippers.

On reaching the landing—the dreaded landing whence opened the room where the officers were concealed with the servant girl—Captain O'Blunderbus felt a violent inclination to make a precipitate rush down the remainder of the stairs to the bottom: but, fearing that such a proceeding would only lead to his capture, as it was certain to excite an instantaneous suspicion of the truth and a vigorous pursuit in consequence, he pursued his way with measured tread, taking good care to rustle the silk dress as much as possible.

The landing of the first floor was gained in safety: he was descending the last flight—and his escape appeared certain,—when a loud double knock at the front-door echoed through the dwelling.

For an instant the gallant officer was staggered: but

a second thought convinced him that it was not his landlady's knock—and he sped boldly on.

Drawing his veil as closely as possible over his countenance, and tucking the parasol under his arm for the moment, he opened the front-door.

The visitor was the Rev. Mr. Emanuel Flummery.

"Ah! my dear madam," said that pious man, stepping into the passage with all the unceremonious ease of a familiar friend, and not at the instant noticing the extraordinary height of the person whom he thus addressed; "I looked in just to ask you how you were—and—and," he added, sinking his voice to a low whisper, "for the purpose of tasting in your arms a renewal of those favours which you yesterday—"

But to the ineffable wonderment of the reverend gentleman, the fictitious Mrs. Rudd dealt him such a sudden and violent blow with a heavy clenched fist, just between his two eyes, that he was floored on the spot; and the captain seizing the front-door key, darted out of the house.

Banging the door behind him, the gallant officer locked it, and marched away with a haste and a rambliness of step which, had any one been passing at the time, would have betrayed his real sex in a moment.

Suddenly, however, it struck him that he was playing a female character; and, instantly relaxing his speed, he assumed a gait so mincing, affected, and fantastic, that his appearance was most comical and ludicrous.

He put up the parasol, and held it so as to screen his countenance, over which he likewise kept the blue gauze veil in many folds; and, in this manner, the gallant gentleman pursued his way half round the Square—not daring to take precipitately to his heels, yet fearful every instant of hearing a hue and cry raised behind him.

"Lauk-a-daisy me!" cried a female voice, suddenly breaking upon the captain's ears, and speaking close by.

"Be Jusus! mim—and is it yourself?" ejaculated the gallant gentleman, stopping short: "because it's me that's ather being Misthress Rudd just at the prisint spaking!"

"You Mrs. Rudd!" exclaimed the infuriated landlady. "Here—murder—thieves—"

"Hould, mim!" said the captain, in a tone so ferocious that it silenced the woman in an instant: "if ye're ather raising an alarm, mim, I'll bethray ye to all the wor-rld for having bestowed your favours yesterday on that spalpeen of a methodist parson—that will I, Misthress Rudd, and bad luck to ye!"

The landlady was thunderstruck—astounded.

"So now, mim, just walk on quietly to your own house, of which I hereby prisint ye with the key," continued the captain; "and mind ye do n't look once behind ye until ye reach your own door—and I'll send your toggery back again this evening—and you'll be sure to give mine to the missinger that brings yours, paying likewise for my trousers, mim. And bewar-r-r, mim," added the gallant gentleman, with a terrific rattling of the r's, "how ye bethray me in any way—if ye valley the sacret of your indacent proceedings with the methodist parson."

Thus speaking, the captain handed the bewildered Mrs. Rudd the key of her house, and hurried on.

From the moment that he had quitted the dwelling until the termination of this scene, scarcely three minutes had elapsed: but the captain was well aware that the bailiffs would not be much longer before they discovered his flight, as the Rev. Mr. Flummery, whom he had so unceremoniously knocked down in

the passage, would speedily and inevitably give them such information as would open their eyes to the real truth of all the recent proceedings.

Accordingly, the gallant gentleman's object was to get away from Charterhouse Square within the shortest space of time possible; and the moment he parted from Mrs. Rudd he struck into the Charter House itself, under the impression that there was a thoroughfare in this direction.

But before he turned under the gloomy archway of that monastic establishment, he looked round and beheld the landlady still standing on the spot where he had left her—motionless, and apparently petrified with horror and astonishment at the threats which he had held out. Her back was, however, turned towards him,—and he therefore felt more at ease in his mind as he entered the Charter House.

"Who do you want, mem?" said the porter, as he emanated from his crib.

But Captain O'Blunderbuss affected not to hear the challenge, and passed on—adopting that mincing affectation of gait which we have before noticed, and which made him appear such a comical figure.

"Well, I'm blowed if I ever see sich a o'man!" muttered the porter to himself, as he returned to his lodge. "Vonderful giantesses ain't nothink to her. And her petticoats—my eye! ain't 'em short too? But sho has n't a very bad leg neither—though her stockins might be a trifle or so cleaner."

The captain continued his way,—still shading his head with the parasol—still keeping the veil closely folded over his countenance,—but not the less able to reconnoitre the place in which he now found himself for the first time in his life.

He beheld a wide, open space, laid out in grass plats, bordered and intersected by gravel walks, and surrounded by low continuous buildings, of uniform architecture and cloistral appearance.

Here and there were scattered groups of old men—collected in knots of threes and fours, and apparently basking in the summer sun, which warmed their frames so attenuated and chilled by age. They did not appear happy—scarcely comfortable or contented;—and could the captain have overheard the remarks which they mumbled and muttered to each other, he would have found that they loathed and detested—hated and abhorred the monastic gloom, the rigid discipline, and the monotonous course of life to which necessity had consigned them.

When the gallant officer made his appearance in this enclosure, his strange and ludicrous figure instantly attracted the notice of the various groups alluded to; and the old fellows began to wonder whom the tall, stately-looking dame was about to honour with a visit.

But by this time Captain O'Blunderbuss had arrived at the unpleasant conviction that there was no thoroughfare either into Goswell Street or Wilderness Row; and he once more found himself, as he subsequently observed, "in a divil of a pother."

The reader is, however, well aware that our gallant friend was not precisely the man to turn back and surrender to his enemies, who, he felt assured, must by this time be instituting an active search after him in the vicinity—even if they had not become aware that he had sought refuge in the Charter House.

What was to be done?

Nothing—save to enlist some kind inmate of the establishment in his interests;—and on this proceeding he at once decided.

From an upper window he beheld a good-natured, red, round, jolly face looking forth, the casement being open;—and a rapid glance showed the captain the staircase that led to the particular room in which the proprietor of that face must be.

He accordingly walked on with the steady pace and apparent ease of a person who had the assurance of knowing his—or should we not rather say *her*—way;—and entering the building, he ascended the stairs, until he reached a door on which was a brass-plate bearing the name of MR. SCALES.

Without any ceremony, the captain walked into the room; and the gentleman with the red face, turning away from the window, began to contemplate his supposed visitress with the most profound amazement.

But how much was this surprise enhanced, when the apparent lady threw down the parasol, exclaiming in a voice of singularly masculine power, "Bad luck to ye! ye damned spalpeen of an umbrilla!"—and then immediately afterwards raised a veil which revealed a face embellished with a fierce pair of moustachios and a very decent pair of whiskers—to say nothing of a certain ferociousness of expression and a weather-beaten complexion, which added to the unfeminine appearance of the whole countenance.

"What the deuce does all this mean?" demanded the Brother of the Charter House, at length recovering the use of his tongue, and with difficulty subduing an inclination to laugh;—for he was a jolly old bird, as his face denoted, and doubtless fancied that some masquerading amusement was in progress.

"What does it mane!" ejaculated the gallant officer; "why, just this, me frind—that I'm no more a woman than ye are yourself—but it's Capthain O'Bluntherbuss I am, of Bluntherbuss Park, ould Ireland. The shiriff's people are afther me—and I 'scaped 'em in this toggery. So now it's your own precious aid and assistance I want—and, be the pow-r-rs! ye'll not repint of any kindness ye may show to a gentleman in temporary difficulties."

Mr. Scales—for such was indeed the name of the red-faced Brother whose hospitality and aid the captain thus sought—now burst out laughing in good earnest; and the gallant officer laughed too—for he dared not show any ill-feeling on the score of his new friend's merriment. Besides, that very merriment seemed to augur a willingness to render the assistance demanded; and therefore the two laughed in concert very heartily and for upwards of a couple of minutes.

At last Mr. Scales's mirth subsided into a low chuckle, until it became altogether extinct so far as its vocal expression was concerned;—and then he enquired in what manner he could render his aid to Captain O'Blunderbuss.

The gallant gentleman very frankly revealed to him his real position: namely, that he had been compelled to beat a precipitate retreat from his lodgings, where he had left his cap, coat, waistcoat, and boots,—that his breeches were at the tailor's,—that he had nothing on but his landlady's garments, barring his own shirt, stockings, and slippers,—that he had not a penny in his pocket, nor indeed any pocket at all as he then stood equipped,—and that he was most anxious to get into the City, where he could obtain funds in a minute.

Mr. Scales indulged in another laugh, and then proceeded to comment on the statement which had been made to him.

"I have got a couple of sovereigns in my pocket,"

he began, "and do n't mind advancing them for your service if they will do any good."

"Faith! and they'll pay the landlady and the tailor!" ejaculated the captain, quite delighted at the prospect just held out.

"Very well," said Mr. Scales. "Then we can recover your clothes for you. But how will it be if the officers are in the house, and, seeing your landlady give me the garments, should follow me?"

"Be Jasus! and Mistress Rudd is completely in my power-r!" cried Captain O'Blunderbuss: "just tell her that if she do n't manage the thing sily for ye, that I'll split upon her and the Riverind Mr. Eminuel Flummery—and she'll turn as make and as mild as a lamb. But I must be afther sinding her back her own toggery."

"I've got a large band-box in my little bed-room adjoining," said Mr. Scales; "and I do n't mind carrying out the gown and the bonnet and shawl in it. Never do things by halves—that's my motto. In the meantime, you can put on my dressing-gown:—I am sorry my own clothes would be much too small for you—or else—"

"Oh! be Jasus! and I'd sooner get back my own," cried the captain. "I niver should dar-r to prisint myself in any other toggery to my frind in the City."

"Well and good: you can step into my bed-room and undress yourself," said Mr. Scales; "and I'll be off as soon as you are ready."

"And them ould fogeys down stairs in the yard," observed the captain,—“they'll be afther quistioning ye, my frind, about the tall lady in the black silk gown that's a foot and a half too shor-r-t for her."

"Oh! leave them to me," said the good-natured Brother of the Charter House: "I'll tell them it's my sister. Bless your soul, they're all purblind, and never will have noticed any thing peculiar in your dress. It's the nurses that I most fear—the char-women of the establishment, I mean;—for if any of them saw you—"

"I did n't observe one of them, my dear frind," interrupted the captain. "But we've niver a ha'porth of time to lose—and so I'll be afther getting out of this infer-r-nal silk gown and Lighorn bonnet."

From the moderate-sized, but lofty and airy apartment in which this colloquy took place, the captain passed into a little chamber only just large enough to contain a bed, a chest of drawers, and a toilette-table: and there he speedily extricated himself from the feminine apparel, all of which he thrust pell-mell into the band-box which his friend had pointed out to him for the purpose. He then wrapped himself in Mr. Scales's dressing-gown; and this being done, he gave the good-natured Brother the necessary instructions how to proceed with regard to the landlady and the tailor.

Having tied a string round the band-box, so as to carry it the more conveniently, and likewise with a better appearance of negligent ease, Mr. Scales now set out on his mission—previously enjoining the captain to keep the door carefully locked until his return, and mentioning a signal by which his knock at the door might be known, so that the gallant officers should not incur the danger of admitting any other person. The moment the martial gentleman was left to himself, he advanced straight up to the cupboard, which he unceremoniously opened; and, to his huge delight, perceived a bottle containing a fluid which was unmistakably of that alcoholic species so widely known under the denomination of gin. The captain took a long draught

of the raw spirit, and, much refreshed, sate down to await his new friend's return.

A quarter of an hour passed, during which he calculated the chances of eventual escape from the bailiffs.

If they had not discovered the trick which was played them, before the captain had entered the Charter House, there was every prospect in his favour; because he felt assured that Mrs. Rudd, even if she had seen him take refuge there, would not dare to betray him.

But if, on the other hand, they had ascertained the whole truth while he was as yet outside the Charter House gates, then they had most probably rushed to the windows and obtained a glimpse of his person in the Square.

And yet, recurring to the chances that were favourable to him, he reasoned that when the noise attendant upon knocking down the methodist minister had reached the ears of the officers, some time would then be lost in receiving explanations from that reverend gentleman, and in vain attempts to open the door—until Mrs. Rudd's return with the key; and in the interim his place of concealment would have been gained, and would remain unsuspected by the bailiffs.

On the other hand, once more, what if the officers had not waited for Mrs. Rudd's return at all, but had leapt out of the ground-floor windows?

"Oh! bad luck to the pro and con!" ejaculated the captain aloud. "I'm safe here—and that's enough. For if the spalpeens had suspected that I am here, they'd have been afther me long ago!"

Rising from his seat, he crept cautiously up to the window and took a survey of the enclosures through which he had passed a short time before; and this reconnoitring process was highly satisfactory. The old Brothers were lounging about as he had just now beheld them; and not a shadow of a sheriff's-officer was to be seen.

Highly delighted by the hopeful assurances which the aspect of things thus conveyed to his mind, Captain O'Blunderbuss paid another visit to the cupboard, and regaled himself with another refreshing draught from the gin-bottle—after which potation, he smacked his lips in approval of the alcoholic beverage, and resumed his seat and his meditations.

The latter continued for another quarter of an hour; at the expiration whereof the gallant gentleman paid his respects a third time to the cupboard; and scarcely had he closed the door of that commodious recess, when the concerted signal was given, announcing his friend's return.

As Mr. Scales entered the room, a glance showed the captain that his friend had succeeded in his mission; for the red countenance wore a triumphant smile, and the band-box had not come back empty.

"Be Jasus! and you're a thrump!" exclaimed the gallant Irishman, as he marked these indications of success. "But what news of them bastes of the aarth—"

"Oh! you're all safe, my dear fellow," interrupted Mr. Scales, wiping the perspiration off his rubicund countenance. "The clothes are in the box—the landlady is intimidated, and therefore in your interests—and the bailiffs have got entirely on a wrong scent. In fact, they had left the house before I got there: but there's no doubt they're waiting about in the neighbourhood—and therefore it will be better for you to remain here until dark, if you possibly can. I will give you a bit of dinner—and may be a glass of grog—"

"Potheen—rale potheen!" ejaculated the captain, viewing with supreme satisfaction the present prospect of affairs.

"Well—whiskey, if you prefer it," said the obliging Mr. Scales. "At all events we'll have a jolly afternoon of it, and drink to our better acquaintance."

"Betther acquaintance!" cried the Irishman, who, in spite of his adventurous kind of existence, possessed many of the truly generous qualities of his much maligned and deeply injured fellow-countrymen; "betther acquainted we can't become, my frind: for when a man has done all he could for another, and that other a tothal stranger to him, I mane to say it makes them inthimate at once. And, be Jasus! Misther Scales, if ye've an inimy in the whole wor-r-ld, tell me his name and give me his address, and it's Capthain O'Bluntherbuss that'll be afther paying him a morning visit, sinding up his car-r-d, and then skinning him alive!"

Mr. Scales expressed his gratitude for these demonstrations of friendship, but assured the gallant gentleman that he had no enemy whom he wished to undergo the process of flaying at that particular time.

The captain now entered the little bed-room, and hastily equipped himself in his own clothing—the breeches, which the good-natured Brother had paid for at the tailor's, being neatly mended: so that the Irishman speedily re-appeared in the semi-military garb which became him rather more suitably than the habiliments of Mrs. Rudd.

CHAPTER CXLVIII.

THE CHARTER HOUSE.

CAPTAIN O'BLUNDERBUSS, having made himself thus far comfortable, wrote a note to Curtis, which Mr. Scales despatched by a messenger to Mr. Bubbleton Styles's office in the City;—for the Irishman calculated that if Curtis should return to the lodgings in Charterhouse Square before the said note reached him, he would, on hearing the adventures of the morning, retrace his way to Crosby Hall Chambers—there to await either the presence of the captain, or at least some communication from him. This arrangement appeared to be far more prudent than to trust Mrs. Rudd with either letter or message announcing the place where the captain was concealed.

The note being written, and the messenger despatched with it, Mr. Scales proposed a luncheon of bread and cheese and porter, as it was only eleven o'clock in the forenoon, and he intended to order dinner for half-past two. A "nurse," as the charwoman was called, making her appearance about this time, the refreshments above mentioned were duly procured; and Mr. Scales intimated to his attendant that he should not dine in the common hall that day, but would entertain his friend with steaks and potatoes in his own apartment.

When the captain and the worthy Brother were again alone together, they fell into a conversation upon the establishment to which the latter belonged and in which the former had found so hospitable a refuge.

"Ye seem to have a comfortable berth of it, my frind," observed the martial gentleman, after burying his countenance for nearly a minute in a pewter-pot.

"Well, the fact is," returned Mr. Scales, "I manage

to make myself happy, because I am naturally of a gay and lively disposition, and I have a great many friends who come to see me. Moreover, I have a few pounds coming in from a snug little annuity—and therefore I can afford those luxuries which the others have no chance of obtaining. But if it weren't for these circumstances, captain," added Mr. Scales, sinking his voice to a mysterious whisper, "I should never be able to endure the place."

"Not endure the place!" repeated the captain, who manifested unfeigned surprise at the observation. "Be the holy poker-r-r! and it sames a broth of a place, it does!"

"Ah! it's all very well for people out of doors to be told of the existence of the charity," resumed the Brother; "and how it gives an asylum to eighty poor men, who are widowers and past fifty years of age: but it's the discipline, my dear sir—the interior discipline,—and then the manner in which we are treated by the authorities of the establishment!"

"Then there's abuses in the Charter-r-r House as well as elsewhere?" said the captain, interrogatively. "Blood and thunther! where the divil aren't there abuses, if this same is the case?"

"No where, when the Church has any influence in the matter," returned Mr. Scales. "But I will explain myself more fully. This institution, you must know, was founded for the purpose of affording an asylum to poor and deserving men, chiefly of the literary or learned professions. But will you believe it? There's scarcely a literary man in the place; and the only one of any repute at all is Mr. Valcrieff, the celebrated dramatic author. The patrons put in their old and worn-out butlers or lacqueys;—but this would not matter, so long as worthy, deserving, and respectable characters were nominated—which is not the case——"

"Then you have some quare characters among ye, I'll be afther guessing?" exclaimed the captain.

"We have indeed, my friend," responded Mr. Scales; "and that is what I chiefly complain of. For instance, we've lately had a certain Colonel Tickner thrust upon us—but who is no more a Colone] than I am. A short time ago he called himself Major Tickner—and a little while before that, he was Captain Tickner. So, you perceive, he rises rapidly—and I have no doubt he will be a General next week."

"A Ginral, be Jasus!" cried Captain O'Blunderbuss. "It's thrue I might have been one myself by this time, if I'd only stuck to the service: but I'll swear by the holy poker-r, that your Colonel Tickner is nothing more nor less than an imposthor—a vile imposthor,—and it's meself that'll unmask him."

The gallant gentleman deemed it necessary to fly into a passion relative to the pretences of the self-styled Colonel Tickner to a high military rank; inasmuch as such a display of indignation on his part at the assumption of another, seemed to justify his own right to the honourable grade of Captain.

"Well, it is shameful for men to pretend to be what they are not," observed Mr. Scales. "This Colonel Tickner sometimes bores me with his company; and it is not at all improbable that he may look in after dinner. If so, we will have some rare fun with him."

"If he dar-r-rs to have ary of his impudence to me," cried the captain, looking particularly ferocious at the moment, "I'll trate him as I trated a French dhragoon at Water-r-r-loo. '*Come hither, ye spalpeen, and let me cut ye down to the middle!*' says I.—'*Oui, Monsieur,*' says he; and on he comes with a rush.—'*Blood and*



stunther!" says I, 'is it fighting ye mane, when I've as good as taken ye prisoner before-hand?'—and gripping him by the throat, I throttled him, sir, in less time than ye'd be in tossing off a thimbleful of potheen. But pray go on telling me about the Charter House, my friend—and let's hear all your little gravances. Ye were spaking of the discipline of the place just now; and sure it's meself that knows what discipline ought to be."

"Ah! my dear sir, the discipline of the Army and that of the Church are two very different things," said Mr. Scales. "We're eighty Poor Brothers in this establishment; and every night the curfew rings—eight strokes of the bell! When one dies, there are only seventy-nine strokes until the vacancy is filled up; and you may believe me when I tell you that there is something horrid in sitting in one's lonely room of a dark wintry night, and counting the bell to see whether a Brother has not died since we all met in the common hall in the afternoon. For there are some very, very old men here; and old men go off, you know, like the snuff of a candle. Then, when one does die, and we hear the bell stop at seventy-nine, it sends the blood all cold and icelike to the heart—and

a shudder creeps over the frame, from head to foot,—for there's no saying whose turn it may be next. Ah! captain, it may seem but a trifling thing to you—a very trifling and paltry thing, this tolling of the curfew-bell: but I can assure you that to us, who are pent up here, it is no such trivial matter. For, in the deep, deep silence of this cloistral building, the dreary, dull, monotonous tolling of that bell suddenly arouses the most painful thoughts—thoughts of approaching death, and coffins, and shrouds, and new-made graves, and all the sombre ceremony of funerals. But to hear that bell toll one less—to know that a Brother has succumbed to the icy hand of the destroyer—to feel that there is a gap in our fraternity—a vacancy in our association,—even though we may not have loved—perhaps not even respected the individual who is gone,—still to have forced upon us, by the deep-toned monitor, the conviction that he is gone,—this—this is terrible in our loneliness!"

The captain made no observation; but he evidently listened with profound attention;—and Mr. Scales, warming in his subject, went on.

"I told you just now that I am naturally of a gay and cheerful disposition, and that I can make myself

happy under most circumstances. But when I am alone here of an evening, and listen to the curfew-bell, I—yes, I also am seized with a cold shuddering, and my blood creeps with an ice-chill in my veins. And if I hear the strokes stop at seventy-nine, it suddenly appears to me that a shape, dim, shadowy, and wrapped in a shroud, flits past me;—and I cast my eyes around—almost dreading lest the pale and ghastly spectre of the deceased Brother should be standing behind my chair. And, when there is one lying dead in the Charter House, I feel afraid at night—and sleep visits not my pillow. I do not believe in ghosts—at least, I do not believe in them when it is day-time: but in the deep, silent, and dark night,—yes, then I believe in them—and I tremble! Oh! you can form no idea of the horrors endured in this place while the curfew-bell tolls: for if it give forth a single note less than the eighty, then every one shudderingly says within himself—aye, and in the solitude of his own chamber—*‘Who knows but that it may be my turn next?’* Is it not cruel, then, to maintain that monastic custom of ringing the nightly bell,—to alarm weak and trembling old men whose intellects are attenuated by the weight of years, and whose imaginations are so susceptible of all influences likely to engender the gloomiest forebodings: for such is the case with the great majority of the Poor Brothers of the Charter House.”

The captain made a brief remark to show that he was listening with deep attention—as indeed he was; and Mr. Scales proceeded in the following manner:—

“Yes—the greater portion of the Poor Brothers are very infirm old men, who need companionship to enliven them, and little attentions to cheer them, and indulgences to render their existence tolerable. But every morning,—summer and winter—hot or cold—sunshine above, or snow knee-deep below,—they must all turn out at an early hour from their warm beds; and while still fasting, must repair to the chapel to attend prayers. And in the performance of this duty, which is rigidly enforced by fine, we are compelled to wear long, dark cloaks, so that when thus muffled up we appear to be a procession of monks, each wrapped in his cowl! Here again you may observe that there is no harm in the custom;—but you must remember that there is a vast difference between what one does spontaneously, and what he is forced by a rigid, inexorable discipline to do. The fact that these poor old men are thus compelled to wear the badge of monastic pauperism is the iron that enters into their souls. They have been compelled by their necessities to accept an asylum in this place—and they feel that they are treated as paupers. Their old age, which the world without believes to be passing in a serene and tranquil happiness here, unruffled by mundane cares, is rendered miserable and wretched by a thousand little vexatious points of discipline which make up an aggregate sum of tremendous ecclesiastical oppression. In the deep silence of the night—the awful silence that reigns throughout this pile,—and in the solitude of his gloomy apartment,—each of those poor old creatures broods upon what he deems to be his wrongs;—and you need not be surprised when I tell you that they are often driven to the very verge of despair—or to the threshold of madness! Ah! and it is not only the curfew-bell—nor the compulsory attendance at chapel—nor the long, dark cowls,—it is not all this alone,” continued the Brother, now speaking with solemn earnestness;—“but it is that we are watched by spies—watched in all our movements within or

without the walls,—watched to be caught tripping, but it never so lightly—in order that we may be punished—or perhaps expelled, to make room for some one whom the Master or any other authority is anxious to provide for. The surgeon is a spy upon us—the porter is a spy upon us—all the nurses are spies upon us; and what is worse,” added Mr. Scales, now sinking his voice to an ominous whisper, and bending his head forward so as almost to reach the captain’s ear with his lips,—“and what is worse,” he repeated, bitterly but still in that low tone,—“we are spies upon each other!”

Captain O’Blunderbuss started, and surveyed his new friend with astonishment.

“I do not mean to say that I am a spy upon the rest—nor will I assert that we are all spies with regard to each other,” resumed Mr. Scales: “but this I declare—that there are many inmates of the place who do enact the part of spies against their fellows. Some wish to curry favour with the Master, Archdeacon Hale—others carry their tittle-tattle to the surgeon;—some gossip of their Brethren to the maniple, or steward—others endeavour to worm themselves into the good graces of even the cook;—and all the nurses, with scarcely an exception, are the spies of the matron. I tell you, sir, that there is a monstrous system of supervision and *espionage* in existence within these walls;—and one Brother cannot talk as a friend to another—because he is afraid that he may be all the time making revelations to an individual who will betray him! We have no confidence in each other—we are all afraid of one another. There is not such a thing as a good-natured chat and harmless conversation in the Charter House. If you make the most common-place observation upon things the most indifferent, Brother Gray, or Brother Jones, or Brother Jenkins will shake his head knowingly, as if he saw something covert and mysteriously significant at the bottom of the remark. But wherefore does such a state of things prevail in the Charter House, you will enquire;—and perhaps you will observe that if the Brethren enact the part of spies upon each other, they alone are to blame for making themselves miserable. Pause, however—and reflect that it is all the fault of the authorities. They encourage this contemptible tittle-tattle—they show favour to the poor silly old dotards who carry them tidings of all the complaints, expressions of discontent, or occasional instances of convivial excess which occur on the part of the rest. These spies are favoured by the authorities: the others know it, and become spies themselves;—and thus they all spy upon each other, even as the Jesuits do in obedience to the rules of their Order. Oh! the mean and contemptible littleness of mind which such a state of things engenders! I am sick—disgusted, Captain O’Blunderbuss, when I think of it.”

“Be Jusus! and well you may be, my dear friend!” cried the gallant gentleman. “But who is the governor, d’ye say?”

“Archdeacon Hale is the Master, as he is called—Archdeacon Hale, the notorious pluralist who fattens upon the loaves and fishes of the Church, without ever having done a single thing to render him deserving of such fine preferment and such large emoluments. He it is who presides over this Protestant monkery,—who enforces in the nineteenth century the grinding discipline of the sixteenth,—who moves the whole machinery of *espionage*, and rules us as a mitred abbot was wont to sway his Romish brotherhood. If a gentleman, reduced by adversity, once enters these

walls as an inmate, he must resign himself to the treatment of a pauper. The authorities look upon us in that light; and the servants behave to us accordingly. The very porter will sometimes call us by our Christian or surnames, without the prefatory *Mister*. If the surgeon visit us, it is evident that he considers himself to be doing us a great favour—just as you may suppose that the medical man belonging to an Union of Parishes behaves towards the pauper invalids requiring his services. Should the Matron have occasion to call upon us, it is with all the airs of a fine lady—she who curtsies and does not dare sit down in the presence of the Archdeacon's wife! The manciple, or steward, is likewise a great man;—and woe to the Poor Brother who does not receive *him* with all possible respect. The nurses attend upon us in a slovenly, negligent manner; and we dare not complain nor remonstrate—for we know that they are spies ready to report us for every incautious word that we may utter, or even to *invent* charges against us. It was but the other day that one of the inmates—a poor old man of nearly seventy—*did* venture to complain of the shameful neglect which he experienced at the hands of his nurse. What was the consequence? She made a counter-charge, to the effect that he had taken liberties with her! The woman's statement—her unsupported statement was believed in preference to the denial and the complaint of the old man, and he was expelled the Charter House for six months—turned out upon the wide world to live how he could, or die as he might! Oh! you have no idea of the tremendous tyranny that is perpetrated within these walls, where all is so silent and all appears to be so serene and tranquil! A short time ago a Brother, driven to despair by the horrors of the place, went away—took an obscure lodging—and put an end to his life by means of poison. The authorities hushed up the matter as well as they could—prevented the interference of the Coroner—and had the man buried within three days from the moment of his self-destruction.† These are all facts, sir—stubborn facts; and the public should know them. Yes—the public should learn that there are eighty old men dwelling in a monastic institution in the very heart of London—enduring a discipline as severe, and subject to a system as despotic and oppressive as in the olden times and in those very cloistral establishments which Henry the Eighth destroyed! The public should be informed that these eighty old men are the victims of ecclesiastical tyranny, and that they are compelled to endure neglect and even insult at the hands of the very servants who are so liberally paid to attend upon them."

"Be the power-r-s! it's a bur-r-ning shame!" cried Captain O'Blunderbuss: "and what's worse of all, is that it's the parsons who are your governors and by consequence your oppressors in this establishment. Bad luck to 'em, say I!"

"A good parson is a most estimable, as well as a most necessary character in society," said Mr. Scales; "and this every sensible man must admit. But an intolerant, illiberal, tyrannical parson is the greatest curse that can be inflicted upon a community. Such is our case—such is our misfortune. We have half-a-dozen parsons belonging to the institution; and their main object is to get all the loaves and fishes to them-

selves. Though they rule us with a rod of iron, they do not mind breaking the regulations themselves. For instance, if a Poor Brother remains away from chapel without the surgeon's leave, or returns home a little after hours in the evening, he is reported and fined—fined out of the beggarly pittance of seven pounds ten shillings a quarter allowed him to purchase tea, sugar, milk, and the many other necessities which the establishment does not supply. But though the regulations specify in distinct terms that the Master is to reside constantly upon the premises, he laughs at the enactments, and passes weeks or months together in the country. No fine—no punishment for him! Who would dare to talk of calling the Very Reverend Archdeacon Hale over the coals? But who does *not* hesitate to kick Poor Brother Gray, or Poor Brother Jones, or Poor Brother Scales from pillar to post, and from post to pillar, if he be caught tripping in the slightest degree?"

"Jist now, me frind," exclaimed Captain O'Blunderbuss, looking particularly fierce, "ye assured me that ye had n't an enemy in the wor-rld: but it sames pritty clare to me that I must be after punching the head of your Archdeacon—or manciple—or porter—or some one, jist to revinge your wrongs and create a little sinsation for the Poor Brothers, as ye call yourselves."

"My dear-fellow, do nothing mad or rash!" cried Mr. Scales, positively believing at the moment that the formidable Irishman was about to declare war against the authorities of the institution, and that he would experimentalise with his fists upon the first of those functionaries who might chance to come in his way. "All that I have been telling you is sacred between you and me;—and as a man of honour, I must appeal to you—"

"Be Jasus! and if it's to me honour-r-r ye appale," interrupted the captain, slapping his left breast with the palm of his right hand, "I'll not brathe a wor-rd to a soul that I'm acquainted with any gravaunces at all, at all. But, remember, if the time should come when ye may feel inclined to administer a thrifling dhrubbing or so to any of thim spalpeens of whom we've been talking—"

"Hush!" cried Mr. Scales, suddenly: "some one is ascending the stairs. Let us pretend to be speaking on matters quite indifferent."

"With all my heart!" said the captain: and, elevating his voice for the behoof of the person who was approaching the room from the stairs, he exclaimed, "Yes—'tis a very fine mornin', Misther Scales—a very fine mornin' indeed!"—just as if, in the natural course of things, he would have made, after a visit of nearly three hours, the remark with which a conversation is usually commenced.

Mr. Scales burst out laughing at this display of his new friend's ingenuity; and the captain laughed heartily likewise—though he knew not precisely at what.

In the midst of this cachinnation, the door opened, and the nurse, or charwoman, entered to lay the cloth for dinner.

CHAPTER CXLIX.

A STRANGE NARRATIVE.

THE nurse was a tall, middle-aged, powerfully-built woman, with brawny arms, and a countenance that indicated a slight affection for an occasional drop of

* Fact.

† Fact. This incident shows how the Ministers of the Established Church will at times unscrupulously set the laws of the land at defiance.

"something short." In fact, it was observed by the Brethren on whom she waited, that she never looked sulky when requested to repair to the public-house to order any thing in the shape of beer or spirits; but if entrusted with an errand of another kind—such as the purchase of half a quire of writing-paper or a stick of sealing-wax—it was a very great chance if she would be seen any more until the next day. Her manners were of the free-and-easy school; and she was accustomed to address the Poor Brothers in a half-pitying, half-patronising style, as if they were patients in a hospital or in the infirmary of a debtors' gaol. If wearied, she would unhesitatingly seat herself without being asked, and glide imperceptibly into a familiar kind of discourse, while wiping the perspiration from her rubicund face with her blue checked cotton apron; and if it were in the cold weather, she would wait upon her masters with a black bonnet, like an inverted japan coal-scuttle, on her head—the propriety of leaving the tegumentary article in the passage outside, never for a moment striking the ingenuous and simple-minded creature.

If this excellent woman had any special failing,—besides such little faults as drunkenness, inattention, slovenliness, cool impudence, and deep hypocrisy,—it was a propensity to gossip and a love of scandal. If she were only carrying a pail down the stairs, and met another nurse with a pail coming up the stairs, they must both set down their pails on the landing, and stop to have a quarter of an hour's chat on the affairs of their respective masters. Then one would whisper how Poor Brother Smith was the meanest skin-flint on the face of the earth; and the other would declare that it was impossible for him to be worse than Poor Brother Webb, who was always complaining and yet never gave her even so much as a drop of gin;—and in this manner the two women would unburthen their minds, to the sad waste of their time and the neglect of those whom they were well paid to render comfortable. But Mrs. Pitkin—for that was the name of the nurse who waited on Mr. Scales and the other gentlemen living in the chambers opening from the same staircase,—Mrs. Pitkin, we say, was a more inveterate gossip than any other charwoman in the place; and, as a matter of course, when she had no trifling truths to retail or make much of, she deliberately and coolly invented a pack of lies, purporting to be the most recent sayings and doings of her masters. The consequence was, that a great deal of mischief resulted at times from these playful exercises of Mrs. Pitkin's imaginative qualities; and more than one poor Brother was looked upon as an habitual drunkard, or as a sad old fellow amongst the women, without any other ground for the entertainment of such an opinion than the mysterious whispers of Mrs. Pitkin.

Well, it was this same Mrs. Pitkin who made her appearance, as already described, to lay Mr. Scales's cloth and get the dinner ready.

"What o'clock is it, nurse?" asked Mr. Scales, suspiciously.

"Only a little after two," she replied: but scarcely were the words uttered, when the Charter House bell proclaimed the hour of three. "Well, I'm sure!" she cried, affecting the profoundest astonishment; "I never could have believed it were so late. Deary me! deary me! But it's all through that disagreeable Mr. Yapp, who would have his cupboard washed out this morning—though I told him it was n't near six months since he had it done last."

"Well—where have you put the potatoes to boil?" demanded Mr. Scales.

"The taters, sir? Lor, sir—did you order taters?" asked Mrs. Pitkin, now pretending to seem more astounded than ever. "Well, I'm sure I thought as how you said you'd have your chops without any waggables at all!"

"Chops!" repeated Mr. Scales, now waxing positively wroth: "I ordered steaks——"

"Steaks!" cried the woman, holding up her hands as if in amazement. "Why—how could I ever have misunderstood you so? But it's no matter—I can just as well get steaks as chops; and one do n't take much longer cooking than another."

"Then, am I to understand that you have as yet got neither chops nor steaks?" asked Mr. Scales, subduing his anger as much as possible.

"Lor, sir! how could I go to the butcher's when there's three of my masters is invalids and dines in their own rooms to-day? But I'll be off at once—and you shall have dinner in a jiffy, I can promise you!"

Thus speaking, the woman walked lazily out of the room; and when the door was closed behind her, Mr. Scales, turning to the captain, said, "Now you perceive how we Poor Brothers are waited upon by these nurses. You heard me give her specific orders to have a steak and potatoes ready for us at two. She comes in at three, and has totally forgotten all about the dinner—for *that* is the English of it. And yet I dare not complain against her: I dare not even speak harshly to the woman's face. But should you not imagine that, after her neglectful conduct, she would make all possible haste to get the meal ready? No such thing! Look there," continued Mr. Scales, motioning Captain O'Blunderbuss to the window: "she has fallen in with another nurse, and they are stopping to have a gossip. Now they are going out together; and before we shall see Mrs. Pitkin again, she will have paid a tolerably long visit with her companion to the bar of the Fox and Anchor."

"Be Jasus! and shall I be after her, my dear frind?" demanded Captain O'Blunderbuss, rushing towards the door.

"It is useless," said Mr. Scales, holding him back: "we must have patience. But do you see that old man, standing apart from the rest——"

"And laning on a stick?" cried the captain.

"The same," returned the good-natured and communicative Brother. "Observe how pensive—how melancholy he seems! That is Brother Johnson—late Alderman and once Lord Mayor of London."

"Be Jasus! and I ricollect!" exclaimed the captain: "'t is the hero of the Romford Bank affair."

"Precisely so," responded Mr. Scales. "And now do you perceive that short, stout, elderly gentleman, leaning on the arm of a friend from outside——"

"He walks as if he was blind," interrupted the captain.

"And blind he unfortunately is," said Mr. Scales: "but not irremediably so. There is every prospect that, with care and good medical advice, he will recover his sight. He is a man who has made so much noise in the world—but with high honour to himself: in a word, he is Valcreeff, the celebrated dramatic author."

"And a most respectable-looking gentleman he is," observed the captain. "I've laughed many times at his farces, and little thought I should ever have the pleasure of seeing the writer-r himself, even at a distance."

"There is one inmate of this establishment," said Mr. Scales, quitting the window and returning to his seat—an example followed by the gallant officer,— "there is one inmate whose early history is very peculiar; and the most extraordinary circumstance connected with the matter is that he believes the events of his younger days to be entirely unknown and unsuspected within these walls. I should not point him out to you, even were he amongst the loungers in the court at this moment: neither shall I mention his name—or rather the name by which he is here known. But I may state that thirty years ago I knew him by the name of Macpherson. We met in Paris, shortly after the peace—and he was living, with a beautiful French woman as his mistress, in very handsome apartments. Her name was Augustine; and she certainly was the most lovely creature I ever saw in my life. Macpherson adored her; and while he believed that she worshipped him in return, her infidelity was notorious amongst all his friends. He had succeeded to a small fortune, by the death of an uncle; and, on visiting Paris, had fallen in with this young lady, whose charms immediately enthralled him. She was a banker's cast-off mistress, and was glad to ensnare a handsome English gentleman in her meshes. Her extravagance was unbounded; and in less than a year Macpherson's resources were completely exhausted. It would appear that Augustine at that period introduced to him a Frenchman whose real name was Legrand, but whom she passed off as her brother. This Legrand was elegant in manners and agreeable in conversation, as well as handsome in person; but he was unprincipled, dissipated, and of broken fortunes. From all I subsequently learnt, and from the knowledge I had of Macpherson's character, I feel convinced that Legrand made my English friend his dupe and victim; and that Macpherson was entirely innocent of any intentional complicity. Certain however it is that one morning I was thunder-struck by the tidings that Macpherson had been arrested on a charge of forgery. I hastened to him in prison; and he declared most solemnly that he was guiltless. It was true that he had negotiated the instrument which was discovered to be fictitious: but he assured me that Legrand had induced him to do so. The examination before the Judge of Instruction led to the arrest of Legrand; and it was confidently hoped by Macpherson and his friends that the real truth would transpire at the trial. But when the case came on, Augustine—the faithless, treacherous, ungrateful Augustine—gave such evidence as entirely to exonerate Legrand and fix all the guilt upon Macpherson. She committed perjury; but her tale was believed,—for it was consistent, though false—delivered with plausibility, though based on the most damnable deceit. In fact, the vile woman sacrificed the Englishman whom she had ruined and never loved, to the French paramour whom she had passed off as her brother; and Macpherson, being pronounced guilty, was condemned to be exposed and branded upon a scaffold on the Place de Grève, and to be afterwards imprisoned for a period of five years at the galleys at Brest. Myself and another English gentleman drew up a memorial to the King, setting forth a variety of circumstances in favour of Macpherson, and imploring the royal mercy on behalf of our unhappy fellow-countryman. Louis the Eighteenth referred the petition to the Judges who had condemned Macpherson, and as they stated that they had taken every thing into consideration when they pronounced his punish-

ment, the Minister of Justice and Grace could not hold out to the petitioners any hopes of a commutation of the sentence. We had endeavoured to obtain the remission of that portion of the sentence which condemned Macpherson to be publicly exposed and marked with a red hot iron—but, alas! this indignity could not be spared the unhappy sufferer. Well, the fatal morning arrived, when this dread public ceremony was to take place. Macpherson rose early, and devoted unusual care to his toilet. His countenance was ghastly pale—his eyes were fixed,—his lips compressed. He did all he could to appear calm, and endeavoured to meet his punishment with firmness. But to be condemned for an offence of which he was innocent;—to see the fairest years of his youth destined to be passed in a horrible state of servitude;—to know that he was about to be branded with an infamous mark, which he would carry with him to the grave,—all this must have been beyond human endurance. Had he been really guilty, his sufferings would not have been so acute;—had he deserved his punishment, he would have bowed to those destinies which he would have thus prepared for himself. But he was innocent—innocent; and the world did not know it:—only a few faithful friends consoled him by the assurance that they believed in his innocence. On the fatal morning which was to consummate his disgrace, I visited him early; but when I found him so apparently resigned and calm, I did not offer those consolations which I would otherwise have tendered, and which were all I had now to offer.

"It was about eleven o'clock, in the forenoon," continued Mr. Scales, "when Macpherson was summoned to the lobby of the prison. Two gendarmes were waiting there to conduct him to the Place de Grève, where he was to remain exposed for two hours, and then be marked. He resigned himself to their custody, and, accompanied by myself, proceeded towards the great square where the hideous ceremony was to be performed. Immense crowds were collected in all the avenues leading to the Place, which was itself thronged to excess. Two lines of soldiers kept a pathway clear for the march of the prisoner up to the foot of the scaffold. He did not cast his eyes downwards:—nor did he glance to the right or to the left; but he kept them fixed upon the scaffold towards which he was advancing. He ascended the ladder with a firm step, accompanied only by the gendarmes; for I was compelled to remain below. The moment he appeared upon the platform, a tremendous shout arose from the thousands and thousands of spectators assembled to witness his punishment; but no indignity of a violent nature was offered to him. He cast a hurried and anxious glance around: the whole square seemed literally paved with human faces, which were continued up every street communicating with the Grève, as far as he could see. The quay behind him, the bridges, the windows and roofs of all the houses, and even the towers of Notre Dame and the parapet of the Hotel-de-Ville were crowded with human countenances. Macpherson remained exposed for two hours, seated upon a chair on the scaffold, while the populace, with hyena-yells and laughter, were contemplating him as if he were a wild beast which they delighted to see, but of which they were afraid. The idea, whether this penalty were deserved or not, never entered the head of one single individual in that vast multitude;—all that they cared about was the man and his punishment—and both were there! At the expiration of the two hours, the crowd suddenly opened, and the

public executioner, attended by his two sons, appeared at the foot of the scaffold. One of the lads carried a small iron pot, at the bottom of which there was a grating; in this vessel was a bright fire of red hot cinders and charcoal. The other boy carried an iron implement in his hand. It was like a very small shovel, with a tolerably long handle. The three wretches ascended the ladder, and the shouts and the hootings of the mob recommenced with increased violence as the public functionary bowed jocosely to Macpherson. A horrible laugh issued from those who stood nearest, and who comprehended the fashion of the executioner's salute. This individual then arranged his *paraphernalia* in a convenient manner. He placed the brazier close to the convict's chair, and put the shovel-looking implement into the fire. He next proceeded to inform Macpherson that he must take off his coat and other vestments from his left shoulder. The prisoner obeyed mechanically. He doffed his coat and his waistcoat on the left side; and the executioner instantly cut a large square piece out of his shirt, just above the left shoulder-blade, immediately above the curve of the shoulder. The most breathless suspense now prevailed; and not a cry—not a murmur was heard throughout the dense masses of people wedged together around. 'Take courage, my boy,' said the executioner, half ironically and half in pity; 'it will only be the affair of a few moments.' I heard him make these remarks—for I was close by the scaffold. He then proceeded to strap the convict tightly down in his chair, confined his arms and legs, and twisted the cords in such a manner around his body and the back of the seat that he was rendered as motionless and powerless as if he were a statue. Ten minutes elapsed, and the thick part of the iron was by that time red hot. This was the crowning moment of the whole day's amusement—an amusement provided by the law that forbade bull-bats and punishes cruelty to animals! The executioner stooped down, seized the iron, and applied it to Macpherson's flesh—to that bare part which the square cut out of the shirt had left exposed. The iron hissed on the young man's shoulder; and a fearful yell escaped his lips. The iron remained upon the flesh for two or three instants: the sufferer writhed in agony; but only that one loud, long, and piercing cry escaped his lips. The implement was withdrawn;—one of the executioner's sons placed a cup-full of water to the convict's lips, and thus saved him from fainting in the chair. The cords were then unbound,—the young man's dress was adjusted,—and the gendarmes told him that they were ready to convey him back to prison. As he passed through the dense multitude that had witnessed his punishment, he now hung down his head—abashed and ashamed. Even had he not felt the smart of the burn upon his back, the knowledge that he was branded with the mark of infamy would have been sufficient thus to humble and subdue him. Women held up their children to gaze upon him as he passed along;—he heard an old father bid his son take warning from the example he had just witnessed; and as he emerged from the crowd, and entered on, he desolately deserted street, on his way back uttered, with a sigh, the following words which were—'Oh! there's the wretch, by one spectator to another,—'Marked! eh—and you who has just been marked!—to his grave!' though with a fear that he would carry it. He returned to the prison, shuddering from head to foot. He entered the lobby of La Force; and the moment he had walked by his side from, he fell into my arms; for I the Place de Grève. The

courage of the man now failed him altogether; and he burst into a violent passion of grief. The tears flowed in torrents from his eyes; his breast heaved convulsively. I endeavoured in vain to console him; and then I thought it best to allow his agony to have full vent, and he would feel relieved. The truth of this opinion was speedily confirmed; and, when Macpherson dried his tears, he exclaimed, 'Now that the first bitterness of my career of misery is over, I feel nerveless and resigned to encounter the ills which heaven has in store for me.'—'My dear friend,' I said, 'you must yet hope for many happy years: the term of your incarceration will soon pass away, and you will then hasten to England, where friends will be prepared to receive you with open arms, and enable you to forget the sorrows that will then be over!'—'Alas!' he cried—and the words still ring in my ears,—'how can I forget all this degradation and infamy? How can I ever again appear in the great world, every member of which will have read my trial, and many of whom have this day seen me writhing beneath the hot iron in the hands of the public executioner? Even supposing my innocence be eventually proved, and that all moral infamy be separated from my name, who will remove the scar from my shoulder? who will not remember that for five years I shall have herded with the refuse of mankind? who will believe that, even if guiltless I went to the galleys, uncontaminated I have been released from them? What father will entrust his daughter to the convict? what mother will consent to the union of her child with a man who has been publicly marked upon the scaffold? what brother would allow his sister, pure and chaste, to link herself to one whose outset in life has been so horribly characterized as mine? And lastly, lastly,' added he, sinking his voice almost to a whisper, and clenching his fists and grinding his teeth as he spoke,—'and lastly, who can remove the deep, deep scar from my heart, even should there be a physician skilful enough to efface the one upon my shoulder?'—I was then compelled to take leave of him; and, on the following day, he was removed to Bicêtre, and lodged with the other convicts who were about to travel the same road together. He now found that his situation was wretched indeed. Compelled to associate with men who had been guilty of the most horrible crimes, and who gloried in their infamy, his ears were offended with their obscene conversation and their fearful blasphemies; and he was ill-treated by his fellow-prisoners, because he would not laugh at their jokes or join in their revolting discourse. If he threatened to complain, he was reviled and mocked. But I shall hasten to the end of my story—or at least to this part of it. The day for the departure of the Chain of Galley-Slaves arrived; and I took leave of my unfortunate friend. He was conducted to Brest, where he worked on the port for a short time; and then, on account of his good conduct, he was made a clerk in the office of the Governor. This was the last account I heard of him while he was at the Galleys; for just at that period the death of a distant relative called me to England, and the inheritance of some property was accompanied with the condition that I should change my name to that of the individual whose fortune thus devolved upon me.

"Six years had passed," continued Mr. Sealoe,— "six years since the events which I have just related to you, when accident enabled me to obtain a complete assurance of that which I had all along fully believed,—namely, the innocence of Macpherson respecting the forgery. I was passing down Aldersgate Street late

one evening, when a sudden shower began to fall; and I entered a gate-way for protection, having no umbrella with me, and there being no hackney-coach stand near. Almost immediately afterwards, a gentleman in a cloak took refuge in the same place; but as I was standing farther in the gate-way than he, and as it was pitch dark there, we did not observe each other's countenance. Presently he stepped out into the street to see if the rain continued; and I noticed that he was accosted by a female, dressed in gaudy attire, and who murmured something to him in French, to which he did not however pay immediate attention. But an exclamation from her lips—an exclamation of surprise, which was instantly followed by the mention of his name—aroused him from his reverie. He gazed at the female who thus appeared to recognise him; and, by the light of the adjacent lamp, the well-known but somewhat altered countenance of Augustine was revealed to him and myself at the same time. Amazement rooted me to the spot, and compelled me to become a listener. 'What, Augustine!' cried Macpherson—for he it was: and all the while my presence was unsuspected.—'Yes, Augustine—that is my name!' said the young lady, somewhat flippantly. 'But what are you doing in London?' she asked immediately afterwards, and in an altered tone.—'How can you ask me, Augustine, after my present pursuits or my future prospects, when you were the principal agent in consummating my ruin in Paris?' demanded Macpherson. 'Oh! you know not the serious injury—the irreparable injury which you have inflicted upon me. All my hopes, all my endeavours, have one after another been defeated and destroyed by the consequences of that fatal period. My life is a series of misfortunes, of strugglings against adversity, of ups and downs, of long intervals of misery, with short and distant gleams of happiness; and this career of sorrows and disappointments, was prepared and marked out by the infernal schemes of yourself and Legrand. Oh! inauspicious was the day on which I first became acquainted with you and the miscreant whom you represented to be your brother?'—'And will you believe me when I assure you that I have never known a moment's peace since the fatal moment when I bore false evidence against you in the French tribunal?' exclaimed Augustine emphatically. 'I was compelled to take that step, although repugnant to my feelings; for I had not then lost all principle,' she added mournfully. 'Legrand possessed such power over me; and I also knew that he was as capable of sacrificing me as well as yourself to his own interests, if I did not fall into his views. That false step on my part has reduced me to my present state of degradation; I became reckless and ceased to sustain even the appearance of respectability which I had observed while I was living with you. Legrand was killed in a quarrel at a gambling-house; and I then became the mistress of—'—'Oh! distract me not with a catalogue of your vices, Augustine,' exclaimed Macpherson, interrupting her recital. 'Can I sympathise with you, who have caused my ruin? can I commiserate with one whom, were I vindictive, I should crush beneath my heel? Oh! could you speak to me of the means of redeeming my character, which is lost—innocent though I am, as well you know,—could you give me back my peace of mind, my self-respect, my confidence in myself, the esteem and respect of men, and the enjoyment of an unsullied name,—could you efface the mark from my shoulder, Augustine, and wipe from my memory the dread im-

pression of the exposure in the Place de Grève with the five long years' sojourn at the galleys,—could you do all this, Augustine, I would throw myself at your feet, I would forgive you the wrongs I have endured, I would almost worship you!'—'There is something which may yet be done,' said Augustine, after a long pause, 'which would partially remedy the evil, and which would at all events prove my contrition for the part that I enacted in the matter.'—'And what is it that you propose?' demanded Macpherson: 'to what do you allude?'—'I would willingly make a confession which would establish your innocence, and so far retrieve your character in the eyes of the world,' said Augustine.—'But the world reviles me, and cries shame upon me, without waiting to ask itself if I am really guilty!' returned Macpherson, bitterly.—'The thinking portion of the community,' began the frail woman earnestly, 'will ever—'—'That is a mere idle phrase, Augustine,' interrupted Macpherson. 'There is no thinking portion, as a complete section, of any community. Ask any individual singly and alone, if he would scorn and shun a man who had endured an infamous punishment, but who was innocent of the crime attributed to him, and he would launch forth into an eulogium of the liberality of his own views, and indulge in a tirade against the narrow-mindedness of his neighbours. He would say, "*Prove your innocence, and I will be your friend.*" So would reply every one whom you thus questioned individually. But take all those persons together—assemble them in one room—invite them all to a banquet—and then introduce amongst them the man concerning whom they had singly expressed so much liberality of opinion; and collectively they would scorn—they would shun him,—they would hunt him from their company—they would expel him as if he were infected with a pestilence! Where, then, is the thinking portion of society? of what men is it composed? who can separate the section from the mass? Talk no more of proving my innocence, but let me now ask you a question relative to your own position.'—'My position!' repeated the young woman bitterly; 'oh! I feel its degradation so thoroughly, that it appears to me as if every body must see and appreciate it also! My shame clings to me, like a mass of dingy cobwebs to a wall: I cannot shake it off; I cannot divest myself of the sense of its utter loathsomeness; for if I seek to brush it away with one hand, it clings to the other. I dare not go to church to seek the comforts of religion:—a prayer in my mouth would be pollution;—I dare not even implore heaven to change my condition, so thoroughly degraded am I in my own estimation! And there are some of us—and when I say of us, you will fully comprehend to what sad sisterhood I belong—who are young, beautiful, and even educated; and from their lips—their red and inviting lips—issue imprecations and blasphemies at all hours. But I am not so bad as that;—nor do I drink as they do! God only knows, however, to what abyss I may fall!'—With these words the wretched creature hurried away in one direction, while Macpherson slowly pursued his path in another. I did not think it right to follow him; for I fancied from the tenour of his bitter outpourings to Augustine, that he wished to be forgotten by the world, and pass as a stranger in the mighty city. Well, years and years elapsed; and misfortunes overtook me. I lost all my property save a very small annuity—a mere pittance insufficient to keep body and soul together;—and through the in-

terest of a friend I obtained a berth in the Charter House. To my surprise I found, on my entrance, that Macpherson was already a Brother;—and thus, after a separation of five-and-twenty years—for it is five years ago that I came hither—our destinies cast us into the same asylum. But, though I recognised him, he knew not me. You must remember that I had changed my name, and my personal appearance had undergone an immense alteration; and therefore it was not singular that he should fail to perceive in me the friend who had consoled him in his misfortunes at Paris in 1816. I have never revealed myself to him within these walls—and never shall. It would doubtless embitter his sorrowful existence were he aware that his secret was known to a living soul in the establishment which his necessities have compelled him to make his home, and from which he will remove to no other abode—save the tomb. Here, then, we dwell—he brooding over the undying sorrow that fills his heart,—I not daring to call him friend and console him.”

At this moment the clock struck four. an hour had elapsed since Mrs. Pitkin had departed with a promise to return “in a jiffey;”—and she now reappeared, her countenance much flushed, and her breath exhaling the strongest perfume of the juniper berry.

She however had her excuse: the matron had sent for her on particular business!

“If so, it must have been at the Fox and Anchor,” muttered Mr. Scales: but perceiving that she had brought up a cooked steak in a covered dish, he suffered himself to be appeased by the prospect of dinner;—and it was agreed both by himself and the captain to dispense with potatoes, Mrs. Pitkin having again quite forgotten that they were ordered.

The repast was now served up; and it must be taken as a proof of contrition for previous neglect on the part of the worthy woman, that when she sallied forth for the beer and spirits she only remained a short half-hour away—it being usually calculated in the Charter House that a commission which one might perform for himself in five minutes, occupies a nurse exactly fifty-five to accomplish.

At last Mr. Scales and the captain were enabled to make themselves comfortable; and when the dinner-things were cleared away, hot-water was speedily procured by the aid of a batchelor's kettle. The poteen was first-rate;—the two gentlemen were in excellent spirits; and the hilarity of the evening was soon increased by the arrival of Mr. Frank Curtis, who had duly received his friend's letter at Mr. Bubbleton Styles's office in the City.

CHAPTER CL.

THE COLONEL AND THE CAPTAIN.

THE captain related to Frank all the numerous and varied incidents which had occurred during the forenoon of that eventful day; and the listener not unfrequently burst into shouts of laughter, as the gallant gentleman described the most ludicrous part of his adventures—we mean the little episode of the escape from the sheriff's-officers in Mrs. Rudd's garments.

Frank, in his turn, gave his gallant friend a hurried but significant intimation that Mr. Bubbleton Styles had “come down” with ten sovereigns—a figure of

speech implying that the City gentleman had advanced that amount for the special behoof of Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Curtis.

The first use the Irishman made of this subsidy, was then and there—fairly and cheerfully—to refund to Mr. Scales the monies advanced by the worthy Brother in the morning; and this little arrangement increased the good feelings of that gentleman towards his new friends, and enhanced the harmony of the evening.

By degrees, as the good liquor produced its exhilarating effect, the captain began to talk magniloquently of his Irish estates, “which were unfortunately locked up in Chancery,”—Mr. Curtis told a great many wonderful stories of his intimacy with Princesses and Duchesses, “when he was in France,”—and Mr. Scales related a number of interesting anecdotes connected with the Charter House, and which had a signal advantage over the narratives of his companions, inasmuch as the former were all true, and the latter all false.

In the midst of the conviviality a knock at the door was heard; and on Mr. Scales exclaiming “Come in,” the invitation was obeyed by a gentleman who was immediately introduced to the captain and Frank Curtis as Colonel Tickner.

The new-comer, who was an inmate of the Charter House, was a man of middle height, and was much older than he thought fit to appear to be; for by the aid of false teeth, a handsome wig, and whiskers well dyed, he was enabled to pass himself off as “just over fifty”—whereas his years had certainly numbered a good fifteen in addition to the amount specified. He was well dressed, and had rather an imposing exterior: but there was an unpleasant expression about the eyes, and in the lines around the mouth, which gave his countenance a sinister aspect, and denoted low cunning, duplicity, and artfulness.

“Sit down, colonel,” said Mr. Scales, when the ceremony of introduction had taken place; “and mix a glass for yourself. I told the captain you were sure to come—and he was most anxious to see you; for I know that military men are particularly fond of meeting each other.”

This remark was made with a sly touch of satire, Mr. Scales glancing the while at the captain, as much as to say, “Now the ice is broken, and you can unmask him;”—for as sincerely as the worthy Brother did not believe Tickner to be a military man at all, so in proportion was he convinced that O'Blunderbuss was.

The colonel looked uneasy for a moment, while the captain, whose natural impudence was increased by his potations, put a bold face upon the matter, and eyed Tickner with lurking ferocity.

“And pray, sir, in what regiment had you the honour-r-r to ser-r-rye?” demanded the Irishman at length, with a menacing reverberation of the ominous r's.

“Oh! in several,” returned the colonel, mixing his toddy without raising his eyes. “Might I ask the same question of you, captain?”

“Be Jasus! and ye may ask, sure enough, my frind,” exclaimed O'Blunderbuss: “but it would be more polite on your par-r-t if you was afther answering my quaries first;—and thin it's meself that 'll give ye my whole pidigree from the beginning to the ind of that same.”

“I should beg to observe, sir,” said the colonel, stirring up his liquor, on which he still kept his eyes



fixed, "that it would be more in accordance with the rules of military etiquette if you were to give the first explanations—seeing that I have the honour to hold a higher rank than yourself in her Majesty's service."

"And, be the holy poker-r!" ejaculated Captain O'Blunderbuss, flying into a passion: "that remains to be proved! There's many a discharged cor-r-poral that dubs himself colonel, to my knowledge."

"And there's many a discharged cad to an omnibus that calls himself——"

But Colonel Tickner suddenly stopped short: for Captain O'Blunderbuss started from his seat, and, grasping the poker, exclaimed, "Be this holy instrument, I shall be affther daling ye a gintle tap on the head, my frind, if ye dar-r to utter a wor-r-d derogatory to my honour-r-r!"

Colonel Tickner stared in ghastly silence at the ferocious Irishman; and to add to the dismay of the former, Frank Curtis, who relished the proceeding hugely, whispered hastily in his ear, "For God's sake, don't provoke him! He's the most terrible duellist in all London: he shot the Duke of Boulogne last year at Paris."

"I really—did not—in fact, it was very far from my intentions——" stammered the discomfited colonel, casting a glance towards the door, to ascertain if there were any possibility of escape; but, alas! *that* was out of the question.

"Nothing but a mafing, or the most abject apology will suffice!" vociferated Captain O'Blunderbuss, perceiving that he had completely overawed his antagonist. "Frank, my frind, run over to our lodgings and fetch my pisthols—in the box covered with green baize, you know—and, be the power-rs! we'll fight it out across the table, each houlding the ind of a handkerchief:—that is to say, with Mr. Scales' lave and per-r-mission."

"Oh! I shan't interfere," said the Brother, enjoying the scene as much as Mr. Frank Curtis, who rose from his chair as if to depart for the purpose of executing the commission respecting the pistols.

"Really, gentlemen," stammered Colonel Tickner, glancing in bewilderment and dismay from one to the other: "I—I am sure—I did not——"

"Did ye mane to insult me?" demanded the captain, brandishing the poker, while his aspect seemed to acquire increased ferocity every moment.

"No—no—certainly not," responded the colonel,

catching at the hope of extricating himself from the deadly perils which appeared to hem him in around.

"And ye acknowledge yourself to be a liar and a scoundrel?" vociferated the terrible Gorman O'Blunderbuss.

"Why, my dear sir—as for that——"

"Don't 'dear sir-r' me!" interrupted the Irishman. fiercely. "Acknowledge yourself to be a liar and a scoundrel—and on my part I shall be ready to acknowledge in return that ye've made sich an apology as a gentleman ought under the circumstances."

"Oh! yes—mutual concessions," observed Frank, with a wink at Mr. Scales, who could scarcely keep, his countenance through a violent inclination to laugh.

"A liar and a scoundrel!" repeated the captain, as he advanced in a threatening manner towards the wretched victim of this egregious bullying.

"Well, my dear sir—if it will satisfy you—and, as your friend observes, on the principle of mutual concessions—I—I——"

"Out with it, man!" roared the captain: "don't keep us waiting all day—for the hot wather is getting cold——"

"You'd better not provoke him any more," whispered Frank: "or I shall be compelled to run and fetch the pistols—unless you prefer having your brains dashed out with the poker."

"Oh! murder!" ejaculated the miserable Tickner, turning deadly pale at the awful alternative suggested: "give me time to breathe, Captain O'Blunderbuss——"

"Not a moment!" cried the ferocious gentleman thus appealed to: "I must have complete satisfaction before ye breathe another puff!"

"Well, then—I admit that I—I am—what you said," returned the colonel.

"Repeat the words! A liar and a scoundrel!"

"A liar and—and—a scoundrel," echoed the humbled and trembling wretch, wishing that the floor would open and swallow him up—or that any other equally improbable casualty might occur, so long as it should remove him from the presence of the ferocious Irishman.

"Ye hear his wor-rds, my frinds?" cried the captain: "he declares himself to be a liar and a scoundrel. And now, as a man of honour-r, I confess myself completely satisfied. The apology is most handsome—and such as reflects the highest credit on him as a gentleman. Give me your hand, sir r!"

The colonel diffidently extended the member thus demanded; and the gallant Irishman shook it with such hearty good will, that its owner winced and writhed with the pain of the iron pressure.

"And now we'll spake no more on military matters," said Gorman O'Blunderbuss; "but drink potheen at our aise, and converse on all kinds of things."

By this little arrangement the captain got rid of the necessity of giving any explanation relative to his own military career; and Colonel Tickner, speedily forgetting the deep humiliation to which the bullying character of the Irishman and his own craven spirit had subjected him, paid his respects with so much earnestness to the whiskey, that Frank was soon compelled to sally forth and procure another bottle—Mrs. Pitkin having returned to her own domicile under the plea of being "very ill," which in plain English meant "very drunk."

The conviviality was maintained until half-past ten, when Captain O'Blunderbuss and Frank Curtis rose to take their leave of Mr. Scales and the colonel.

But before they departed, the Irishman renewed his expressions of gratitude and his protestations of friendship to the worthy Brother who had manifested so much kindness towards him;—and, highly delighted with their evening's entertainment, the two "inseparables" walked off arm-in-arm together.

Now how gloomy—how truly monastic appeared the Charter House, as they traversed the spacious court, bounded by the low, uniform ranges of buildings. Most of the windows were dark; but here and there a flickering light was gleaming—feeble and faint as the spirit of the old man for whose long lonely hours even that poor candle was a species of companion.

In spite of the natural liveliness of the two friends' dispositions—in spite of the whiskey they had imbibed—they shuddered at the aspect of the place, in the more than semi-obscurity of the starlight, seemed cold and cheerless to the view,—aye, and struck so to their very hearts.

Their footsteps raised echoes which sounded hollow and gloomy, as if coming from the midst of tombs; and if they paused for a moment, the silence was so deep—so profound, it seemed impossible that the place was in the very midst of the mightiest metropolis in the world.

The feelings of the two friends were such, that they could not have uttered a ribald word nor given vent to a jest or a laugh, as they traversed an enclosure where the stillness was so awful and the cloistral aspect of the scene so coldly, sternly monastic.

Had their way lay through a vast cathedral, at the silent midnight hour, they could not have experienced a sense of more painful oppression; nor would a deeper gloom have fallen upon their spirits.

It was a great relief when the porter closed the wicket of the massive gates behind them;—and as they hastily skirted Charterhouse Square—keeping a good lock-out for fear of unpleasant prowlers in that region—the captain whispered to his companion, "Well, Frank—and, be Jasus! I'd sooner be knocked about the wor-rld as you and I are at times, me boy, than take up my quar-r-ters altogether in that place. It's all very pritty, no doubt, while one has his frinds with him; but when they're gone, Frank, it strikes me that the loneliness becomes tin thousand times more lonely."

"I'm just of the same opinion, captain," returned Mr. Curtis. "And now where shall we put up for the night?"

"Be the power-rs! and we've cash in our pockets—and it's afther pathronising some tavern we'll be until the morning, when we'll take fresh lodgings," exclaimed the gallant gentleman, his naturally good spirits reviving, as he found himself safe in Aldersgate Street, and no suspicious-looking characters dodging him in the rear.

CHAPTER CLI.

THE CALM—THE TEMPEST.

RETURN we now to Charles Hatfield and Perdita.

The gorgeous lustre of a Parisian summer morning streamed through the muslin curtains of a handsome chamber in the hotel at which they had taken up their abode; and the glory of that sun-light shone upon the nuptial couch where the newly-wedded pair still slept.

The night of bliss had passed; and, wearied with love's dalliance, they had fallen into a deep slumber, the dreams of which were soft and voluptuous, and gave no forewarning of a coming storm.

The long, luxuriant, deep brown hair of Perdita flowed over the snowy whiteness of the pillow; and the dark, thick, slightly curling fringes of the closed eye-lids reposed on cheeks flushed with the ecstatic nature of her visions.

A gentle smile played upon her moist lips of richest red,—a smile that subdued the expression of resoluteness which her countenance was wont to wear, and gave an indescribable charm of serenity and sweetness to features usually indicative of such strong passions and such fierce desires.

But those passions were now lulled to rest: those desires were for the time assuaged;—and happiness filled the soul of the sleeping woman.

One fine, white, and robust arm lay outside the coverlid: the other supported the head, or rather half embraced the neck of her young and handsome husband.

The sunbeams seemed to kiss her flowing hair,—revelled to play with the exquisitely modelled arm that lay completely exposed,—seemed also to revel in the treasures of her naked bosom, so firm, so rounded, and so regularly heaving.

Sleep likewise sealed the eyes of Charles Hatfield: smiles likewise played upon his lips;—and his countenance appeared a perfect specimen of god-like beauty incarnate in man.

Yes: they were a handsome pair;—and so far there was a remarkable fitness in their union—but in naught better!

In perfect happiness had they sunk into the profound slumber which still enwrapped them;—for, on the one side, Charles Hatfield had become possessed of that woman of glorious loveliness who had enchanted—captivated—enthralled his very soul;—and, on the other, Perdita believed herself to have gained the title of *Viscountess Marston* already, and to have that of *Countess of Ellingham* in perspective.

It was nine o'clock in the morning;—the morning succeeding the bridal night: and thus were the newly-wedded pair still sleeping in the nuptial couch.

Presently the door opened, and Rosalie entered the room,—Rosalie, naturally so gay, blithe, and full of spirits—but now with a cloud upon her brow, and evident anxiety in her manner.

Advancing towards the bed, she paused—gazed for a few moments upon the sleepers—and murmured to herself in French, "How handsome and how serenely happy they appear to be! What a pity it is to awake them!"—then, after another short pause, she said hurriedly, "And yet it must be—for the stranger is imperative."

Thus speaking, she touched Charles Hatfield gently on the arm; and he woke up, with a start. But Rosalie immediately put her finger to her lip to enjoin silence; and the young man, now completely aroused, surveyed her with mingled surprise and anger,—surprise at her mysterious behaviour, and anger at her intrusion.

"Hush!" she said, in a low but emphatic tone. "A gentleman insists upon seeing you—and, as his manner is so curious, I thought I had better awake you first, sir," she added, glancing significantly towards her mistress, who still slept on.

"A gentleman!" repeated Charles, a suspicion—almost a certainty of the real truth flashing to his mind: "describe him!"—and he also spoke in a whisper, though with emphasis.

Rosalie gave a hurried sketch of the individual who so imperiously demanded an immediate interview with her master; and Charles found that his conjecture was correct—too correct, indeed!

"Go to him—and say that I shall be with him in five minutes," he observed, in a tone expressive of deep vexation;—and Rosalie retired.

Charles immediately rose from the couch, but without awaking Perdita; and, having hastily slipped on some clothing, he proceeded to the sitting-room belonging to the suite of apartments which he had hired at the hotel.

He now found himself face to face with his father!

Mr. Hatfield was pacing the parlour in an agitated manner, when the young man entered;—his countenance was very pale, and wore an expression of deep care; indeed, Charles was shocked when his parent, turning round to accost him, thus presented to his view an aspect so profoundly wretched—so eloquently woe-begone.

The young man, during the few minutes which had intervened from the time that Rosalie quitted his bed-chamber until the instant when he repaired to the sitting-room, had nerved himself with all his energy—braced himself with all his courage—mustered all his resolution, to undergo what he knew must prove a painful trial; for he expected accusations of disobedience and ingratitude—reproaches for unmanly conduct towards Lady Frances Ellingham,—in fine, a repetition of those scenes which had latterly occurred at the Earl's mansion in Pall Mall, and which, characterised by so much misconception as they had been, had materially tended to diminish the authority of the father and the respect of the son.

Yes: he had made up his mind to bear upbraidings and encounter the most painful remonstrances;—he had even resolved to recriminate in the old style—reproaching his father for the wrongs which he imagined himself to have sustained at his hands relative to the secrets attendant upon his birth and social position. But when he beheld the expression of deep care and the sallow pallor which sat upon that father's countenance, his rebellious heart softened—his stern resolves gave way—his better feelings once more stirred within him;—and all on a sudden it struck him that there must be some reason for his parent's altered appearance, of a nature more grave—more serious, than the mere grief which this runaway match could possibly occasion.

The thought that evil had happened to his mother flashed to his mind;—and in an instant all his imaginary wrongs were forgotten.

"Father—dear father," he exclaimed, in a tone of earnest appeal; "keep me not in suspense! My mother—"

"Is as well, I hope, as under circumstances she can possibly be," interrupted Mr. Hatfield, in a hollow and sombre tone.

"Thank God!" cried Charles, fervently.

"Is it possible that you still love your mother?" demanded Mr. Hatfield, whose countenance brightened up in the faintest degree, but in a manner as sickly as if the gleam of a dying lamp fell upon the rigid features of a corpse.

"Is it possible that you can ask me the question?" exclaimed the young man. "Oh! you know that I love my mother—my dear mother," he repeated, as a thousand proofs of her affection for him suddenly rose up in his mind—rapidly as the spell of an enchanter might cause flowers to appear upon the surface of a

stern and arid waste. "And you, my father," he continued, taking his parent's hand, and pressing it to his lips, "I love you also—in spite of what you may suppose to be my disobedient conduct!"

"No—no—you love me not!" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, hastily withdrawing his hand which for a few moments he had abandoned to his son: "else never would you have acted thus. But tell me, Charles—tell me,—for I did not condescend to question your flippant French servant,—tell me—have I come too late to save you?—are you married to that young woman——"

"If you mean, father, whether Perdita Fitzhardinge is now my wife," began Charles, drawing himself up proudly, and speaking in a resolute—almost indignant tone,—"*I*——"

"Perdita Fitzhardinge!" repeated the unhappy man, staggering as if from a sudden blow dealt by an invisible hand: "oh! then 't is indeed she—and all my worst fears are confirmed! Villiers was right—and those officers were right also!"

"What mean you, father!" demanded Charles, now seriously alarmed—though knowing not what to think. "You speak of a young lady of ravishing beauty—elegant manners—spotless character——"

"Charles Hatfield, is she your wife?" asked the parent, now advancing close up to the young man, and pressing his arm so violently with the strong spasm which convulsed his fingers that Charles winced and almost cried out through the pain inflicted; for his arm felt as if it were grasped by fingers of iron!

"Yes, father—I am proud to inform you," he said, again assuming an air of noble independence,—"*I* am proud to inform you——"

"Fool—madman—senseless idiot!" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, his rage suddenly bursting forth with such volcanic fury that his son fell back in terror and dismay and eyed his father as if he thought that he must be insane. "you know not what you have done—the misery, the wretchedness you have prepared for yourself—the ashes you are heaping upon your own head—the infamy and disgrace you have brought down upon yourself and all connected with you——"

"Father—father!" cried Charles, now becoming full of wrath in his turn: "you exceed the license which belongs to a parent even when the son is in his nonage! Remember that you are alluding to the marriage which I have thought fit to contract——"

"A marriage which will embitter the remainder of your days, sir," retorted Mr. Hatfield, turning sharply round upon his son, and speaking with almost savage rage.

"This is unworthy of you—and I shall hear no more," said Charles, in a haughty tone and with a dignified manner, as he made for the door.

"Stop, sir!" cried Mr. Hatfield, rushing after him and detaining him forcibly by the arm: "we may not part thus——"

"Speak not evil, then, of my wife!" exclaimed Charles, turning round, and darting on his sire a look of superb defiance.

"Your wife!" repeated Mr. Hatfield, his manly voice suddenly assuming the almost shrieking tone of a wild hysterical laugh: "your wife!" he said, now echoing his own words. "Oh! my God, that I should hear you call that woman—that vile, profligate woman, by the sacred name——"

"Father!" ejaculated Charles Hatfield, now goaded to desperation, and raising his arm in a menacing

manner: "forbear—forbear, I say," he continued in a hoarse, thick voice,—"*or, by the heaven above us! I shall strike even you!*"

"Listen—listen, Charles—for God's sake, have patience!" cried Mr. Hatfield, the thought now flashing to his mind that in his ungovernable passion he had dealt only in epithets and averments as yet unintelligible to his son—whereas he should at once have revealed facts, terrible and startling, crushing and overwhelming though they might be.

"I will hear you, father," said the young man, now speaking in a tone of dogged sullenness; "but again I warn you not to provoke me beyond the power of endurance."

"No—no—I will not anger you, my son," rejoined the unhappy parent, becoming comparatively calm and even mournful in his manner and aspect; "for, alas! I have tidings to reveal to you which will pierce like a dagger to your heart's core. The woman whom you have wedded as your wife——"

"Again that contemptuous name of '*the woman*'!" ejaculated Charles, fire flashing from his eyes.

"Patience!" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, firmly: "that woman has deceived you—duped you—entangled you, heaven alone knows how! to your utter undoing;—for she is the profligate and abandoned daughter of a vile and tainted wretch—a returned transport!"

"'T is false—false as hell!" thundered Charles, the workings of his countenance rendering him, handsome though he naturally was, hideous and horrible to behold.

"'T is true—'t is true!" cried Mr. Hatfield, as if catching up the terrible emphasis with which his son had spoken. "Perdita Slingsby—for that is her name—is a wanton, beauteous though she may be: and it was but two days ago that I accidentally heard the full narrative of her profligacies in Sydney, from two officers quartered at Dover."

When the dreadful accusation that his wife was a wanton had fallen upon the young man's ears, his boiling rage was on the point of bursting forth, with all the violence of language and clenched fist, against the author of his being: but when the allusion to the officers at Dover immediately followed, the scene on the Parade suddenly flashed to his memory, and a faintness—a sensation of sickness came over him,—and he staggered to a sofa, on which he sank as if exhausted and overcome.

"Father—father," he murmured, horrible suspicions now rising up one after another, with lightning speed, in his soul: "your words are terrible—they will kill me! And yet," he added, in a firmer tone, as a ray of hope gleamed in upon his darkening thoughts,—"*I* am a fool to believe this tale! No—no—it is impossible! Perdita is pure and virtuous—and there is some dreadful mistake in all this."

But even as he uttered these words, a secret voice seemed to whisper in his ears that he was only catching at a straw, and that he was in reality drowning in the ocean of truth which was pouring in with such sweeping rapidity and overwhelming might upon him.

"There is no mistake, my son," said Mr. Hatfield, in a voice of profound melancholy. "Would to heaven that there were!" he added, with such deep conviction of the misery which his words implied, that all hope perished suddenly in the breast of his son. "You have become the prey to two designing women: for I heard terrible things at Dover, I can assure you! The officers to whom I ere now alluded, had recognised Perdita leaning on your arm——"

"Yes—yes: I see it all now!" exclaimed Charles, covering his face with his hands, and pressing his fingers with almost frantic violence against his throbbing brows.

"And those officers—with sorrow and grief do I tell you all this—had themselves shared the favours of Perdita in Sydney; and as for the mother of the abandoned girl—know you what has become of her?" suddenly demanded Mr. Hatfield.

"No: we missed her at Dover—just as we had embarked on board the French steam-ship——"

"Then you are doomed to receive another dreadful shock, my poor boy," continued Mr. Hatfield, in a tone of deep commiseration: "for Mrs. Slingsby—or Mrs. Fitzhardinge—or whatever she calls herself—was arrested at Dover, in consequence of a communication made by electric telegraph from London——"

"Arrested!" cried Charles, his amazement for a moment becoming stronger even than his deep—deep grief.

"Yes—arrested on suspicion of being concerned in a murder of an atrocious character at Pentonville!" added Mr. Hatfield, in a solemn and impressive tone.

"Merciful God!" ejaculated the young man, clasping his hands together as if in mortal agony: "surely I have fallen in with fiends in female disguise. But Perdita—Perdita," he cried, the lingering remnants of affection causing him to hope that he was destined to hear nothing more terrible of *her* than the revelations which had already crushed him as it were to the very dust: "she at least, father, is unsuspected in this dreadful affair?"

"The old woman who is suspected, and whose countenance was seen by a witness as she issued from the house of the murdered man,—that old woman, who is no doubt Mrs. Slingsby, was accompanied by another and younger female——"

"Tell me no more, father!" almost yelled forth Charles Hatfield, literally writhing on the sofa, as if with the poignant anguish of a wound in a vital part.

"Compose yourself, my dear son—if it be possible," said the disconsolate parent: "for I have many other things to tell you,—other dreams to destroy,—dreams equally as bright as the hallucinations which you had entertained relative to this wicked and hypocritical Perdita. But first I ought to observe that there appears to be no direct evidence to fix the murder of Mr. Percival——"

"Percival!" repeated Charles, another and still more dreadful pang shooting through his heart: "tell me—Percival did you say?—Percival—a money-lender——"

"The same," cried Mr. Hatfield: "for I last evening read the entire account of the murder in an English paper which I saw at the hotel where I have put up."

"Then is the horrible surmise too true—too accurate," said Charles, in a hollow tone, while his face grew ghastly once more; "and it must have been these demons in female shape who caused his death. But on what night, father," he demanded with abrupt impatience, "did the murder take place?"

"The night before you quitted London," was the answer.

"Ah! then it is clear—clear—clear, beyond all possibility of doubt!" exclaimed Charles. "Yes—it was on the night in question that my note of hand was discounted by that same Percival—for Perdita has since told me that such was the name of the money-lender," he continued, in his soul-harrowing murmur.

"You have been raising money, then, Charles?" said Mr. Hatfield. "But that is a miserable—a contemptible trifle compared to all the rest! May I however ask you on what security—or on what prospects—you have obtained a loan and given a promissory note?"

"Father, henceforth there must be no secrets between us!" returned the young man, becoming respectful, submissive, and even imploring in his tone and demeanour. "The dreadful revelations of this morning have destroyed all that egotistical confidence in myself and my own wisdom——"

"Yes, Charles," interrupted Mr. Hatfield, taking his son's hand and speaking in a kind, commiserating tone; "you have been too susceptible to first impressions—you have formed hasty opinions—you have grasped at shadows—you have revelled in delicious hopes and pleasing aspirations, without ever pausing to reflect that the very foundation-stone of all this castle-building was a mere delusion."

"I do not comprehend you, father," said the young man, now surveying his parent with profound surprise: "unless, indeed, you allude to the destruction of all the bright visions which I have conjured up respecting the false—the wicked—the abandoned Perdita."

"No, my dear son—I am now seeking to direct the conversation into another channel," responded Mr. Hatfield, with solemn emphasis; "for, alas! I can too well divine the deplorable error which you have adopted and cherished as a substantial truth."

"An error, father!" repeated Charles, still completely mystified.

"Yes—an error of the most afflicting nature,—afflicting to you—afflicting to me—afflicting to your mother also," added Mr. Hatfield, his voice becoming low and melancholy. "In a word, Charles, you believe yourself to be that which you are not—your ambition has blinded you—your pride has led you into the most fatal misconceptions——"

"Father, you allude to my birth!" exclaimed the young man, starting as he spoke. "Oh! is there any delusion in my recently formed opinions in that respect?"

Mr. Hatfield rose—and paced the room for a few moments: the whelming tide of recollections of the past was now combined with that of the sorrows of the present and the fears for the future;—and his emotions were so powerful, that his voice was choked—his faculty of speech was for the time suffocated by ineffable feelings.

"Father—keep me not in suspense, I implore you!" said Charles, rising from the sofa and accosting his parent. "I am nerved *now* to hear any thing and every thing, however terrible, in relation to myself! Only keep me not in suspense, I beseech—I implore you!"

"Alas! my dear boy," exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, turning towards him with tearful eyes,—“if I tell you all connected with your birth—I—I shall unmask myself—I shall stand revealed before you as a monster whom you must henceforth loathe and detest.”

"No—no," cried Charles, now throwing himself into his father's arms and embracing him tenderly: "for the fatal difficulties—the cruel embarrassments, in which I have plunged myself by my accursed folly—my insane infatuation,—all these convince me that I need a kind friend and adviser—and in you, my dearest father, I shall find both!"

"Your language—your altered manner—your affection determine me to throw myself upon your

mercy, Charles," said Mr. Hatfield, in a low and profoundly mournful tone: "yes,—'t is the strange—the unnatural spectacle of a father imploring a son to forgive *him*—the father—the stain and the stigma which mark that son's birth!"

"Holy God! have I heard aright?" ejaculated Charles, pressing his hand to his brow;—and, staggering back, he sank on the sofa,—not in a swoon—not in a state of insensibility,—but stunned and stupefied, as it were—and yet retaining a maddening consciousness of *all*!

"Yes," continued his father, speaking in a sepulchral, unearthly tone, and averting his head,—“you are, alas! illegitimate, my dear boy; and the hopes—the aspirations, which I *know* you have formed, are all baseless visions!”

"And yet," cried Charles, again starting suddenly from his seat, "you assured me—emphatically assured me, that my mother was pure—innocent—stainless;—and it was this averment that led me, in connexion with the discovery which I lately made of other great secrets,—it was this declaration on your part, I say, which led me to form those hopes—indulge in those aspirations!"

"Oh! my God—it is now that I am to appear as a monster in your eyes, Charles!" exclaimed the wretched father, in a voice of bitter anguish: "and yet to guard against all future misconceptions, since past ones have wrought such deplorable mischief—I must reveal every thing to you! Yes—your mother *was* stainless—*was* pure—*was* innocent;—and I—villain, miscreant that I was—I forcibly took from her that jewel of chastity—"

"Enough—enough!" almost shrieked forth Charles Hatfield, extending his hands imploringly: "utter not another word—I understand you too well already!"

"And you have *read* the history of my past life, Charles—is it not so?" asked the unhappy parent. "Yes—yes: I know you have *read*—in the *Annual Register*—the frightful narrative—"

"Father," said the young man, rising, and grasping the hands of his sire: "you must not blush in the presence of your son! Once for all, let me state that I *do* know every thing;—and now let the past—so far as it regards yourself—be buried in oblivion. My impertinent curiosity first led me to make those researches into mysteries which I should never have sought to penetrate;—and the knowledge I accidentally acquired, led me to form hopes which have exercised a fatal influence upon me! I discovered that you were the real Earl of Ellingham; and, deeming myself to be your legitimately born son, I conceived that you had wronged me by keeping me in darkness in respect to the title which I fancied to be my own,—in respect, also, to the higher title to which I believed myself to be the heir! Now—now, I can no longer blame you for having observed so much mystery: Oh! no—on the contrary, I have rewarded all your kindness towards me, with the blackest ingratitude."

"We will pardon and forgive each other," said Mr. Hatfield, solemnly: "you shall pardon and forgive me for the stigma that attaches itself to your birth—you shall likewise pardon me your mother's wrongs, even as she herself has long, long since pardoned me: and I, on my part, will think no more of all that you have lately done—save to extricate you from the cruel embarrassments in which by your hasty conduct, your imprudence, and your misconceptions, you have become involved. In a word, I will be to you as a kind friend and adviser;—and if henceforth I may not hope

for your affection—at least I may reckon upon your gratitude."

"Yes—both, both!" cried Charles Hatfield, again embracing his father tenderly. "Oh! how wicked—how criminal I have been! A veil has fallen from my eyes—my soul has lost its dogged obstinacy—and I now perceive how ungrateful I have been to my dear mother and yourself. But if it be not too late to repair the past," he continued, retreating a few paces, and addressing his parent with a tone and manner of solemn earnestness,—“if it be not too late to regain my mother's love and your's also,—oh! then the remainder of my life shall be wholly and solely devoted to that one object! Yes—I will reinstate myself in your esteem—I will prove by years of affection and obedience how bitter is my remorse and how sincere is my repentance for the follies and indiscretions of a few weeks! But in the meantime, father—in the meantime, how am I to act towards the vile—the guilty woman, whom I lately loved so madly?"

"Where is she at present?" demanded Mr. Hatfield, profoundly touched by the contrition and altered feelings now manifested by his son.

"I left her asleep in a chamber belonging to this suite," was the reply. "Oh! I dare not meet her again—for I fear that I should spring upon her like a tiger, and sacrifice her to my resentment! For all my affection has now turned to a bitter—burning hatred,—a hatred against herself and her more vile mother; and I am astounded when I reflect how completely I have been deluded by them. It appears to me a dream—a vision! I can scarcely bring myself to conceive that I could possibly have been so insensate—so mad—so blind—so besotted! Oh! I could dash my head against the wall, to punish myself for this atrocious folly!"

And the young man struck his clenched fists forcibly against his forehead.

"Compose yourself—in the name of God! compose yourself," said his parent, rushing in upon him and restraining him from the commission of farther violence. "Give not way to despair, my dear son—meet your misfortune with courage—"

"Oh! it is easy thus to recommend patience and endurance," exclaimed Charles, bitterly: "but think how cruelly I have been deceived! I was fascinated as by the eyes of a serpent;—the magic of her charms, the melody of her voice, the sophistry of her tongue, and the excitement of her caresses, threw spells of an irresistible nature upon me: I was enchanted—held captive in silken chains—dazzled by the almost superhuman beauty of that prodigy of deceit and wantonness! I was not allowed time for reflection—suspicion had no leisure to rise up in my bosom, much less to fix its habitation there;—for I was whirled along, as in a delirious dream, from the first instant that I met that woman until the instant when your revelations of this morning dispelled the entire illusion. The artfulness of that designing creature sustained a constant elysian excitement in my soul: a perpetual succession of insidious wiles, of apparent proofs of deep tenderness, and of caresses that would enthrall the heart of a saint,—such—such was the magic course in which I was hurried madly along. Endowed with a wondrous presence of mind, she had a ready answer for every question that I put to her—even to the explanation of her singular name;—and, with a guile as profound as it was ravishing—with an artfulness as deep as it was calculated to enchant and captivate—she invested the history of her early days

with a mystery which only increased my admiration, and made her appear more interesting in my eyes."

"You cannot wonder, then, that you were so completely deceived, my poor boy," said Mr. Hatfield, who had listened with great, though mournful interest to the eloquent delineation of causes and effects which the impassioned language of the young man had so graphically shaped. "But as for the designing creature's name, I heard its origin from the officers whom I met at Dover. She is called *Perdita*, or 'The Lost One,' because she was born in Newgate—and her mother, in the moment of repentance for her own crimes, gave her that appellation as a memorial and a warning."

"Heavens!" ejaculated Charles; "and I believed the specious—the plausible explanation which the artful girl gave me relative to her name! Oh! she is made up of deceit: the world has never known her equal in that respect. I have read of *Circe*, with her spells—and of the *Syrens*, with their perilous allurements;—I have read also of those *Mermaids*—with the heads and busts of beauteous women, and with the tails of monsters—and whose melting looks and ravishing songs enticed sailors to their coasts, only to fall victims to these unnatural devourers of human flesh:—but all these wonders of heathen mythology are surpassed by this modern *Circe*—this *Siren* of the nineteenth century—this *Mermaid* who preys, not on mortal flesh, but upon immortal souls!"

There was a terrible earnestness in the tone and manner of Charles, as he gave utterance to these words:—and his father perceived that the heart of the young man was painfully lacerated by the conviction of *Perdita's* tremendous duplicity.

"Yes," resumed Charles,—and Mr. Hatfield allowed him to speak on, knowing that feelings so powerfully excited as his had been and still were, must have a proper vent, in order that the soul might regain something approaching to the equilibrium of calmness:—"yes," exclaimed the young man, passionately,—“she, whom I believed to be the mirror in which all excellent qualities were reflected, is the embodiment of every possible vice—every earthly iniquity. Oh! what a splendid personification of *Sin* would she make for the painter or the architect! But it must be a bold pencil or a powerful pen that could do justice to her,—aye, and a man deeply read in the mysteries of human life, to portray her character with accuracy! And that character I can read now;—and I know her to be a creature who has studied sensuality, with all the ardour of a glowing temperament—with all the vivid sensibility that could enhance the joys of amorous enchantment! Oh! mine was an idolatry such as a rapt enthusiasm pays, in its blind belief, to the Spirit of Evil, conceiving it to be the source of every virtue! Fatal mistake—deplorable error: shall I ever surmount the terrible consequences?"

"Yes—by taking courage, following my counsel, and placing me in full possession of all the minutest details of this distressing and perplexing case," said Mr. Hatfield, assuming the part of a comforter, now that the indignation of his son had in some degree expended itself in those passionate outpourings which we have endeavoured to describe.

"Oh! fear not, my beloved father—my only friend," cried Charles, warmly,—“fear not that I shall now conceal aught from you! I have obeyed the impulses of my own wrongheadedness—and I am suffering terribly in consequence: I have followed the dictates of my own wilfulness—and I have gone lamentably

astray! The result is that I have no more confidence in myself: from the pinnacle of that proud independence which I sought to assume, I am dashed down into a state of childish helplessness. If you abandon me—I should not have courage even to attempt to extricate myself from this maze of embarrassments in which I am so cruelly involved: I should resign myself to my fate—I should sink into despair!"

"Cheer up, my beloved son—and think not for a moment of these dreadful alternatives," said Mr. Hatfield: "but answer me a few questions, and I shall then know better how to act. Did you not find certain papers in a secret recess in the Earl's library—"

"Yes—and those papers are safe," replied Charles: "at least—*Perdita* has them secure in her writing-desk, and we will make her surrender them presently."

"As her husband—alas! that I should have to speak of you as such,—you may break open that desk and take them by force," said Mr. Hatfield: "Does the young woman know their contents?"

"Unfortunately she does," was the mournful answer.

"And her mother—"

"Is equally well acquainted with them," said Charles. "Even to save you a pang,—and heaven knows I would now do much to spare you any additional uneasiness,—I will not deceive nor mislead you in a single detail."

"No—this is not a time nor a case for trifling," Charles, observed Mr. Hatfield. "Then both these women know who I am?" he added, in a low and hoarse voice.

"Oh! my God!" cried Charles, giving vent to his deep vexation and obeying the impulse of his self-accusing spirit: "to what humiliations have I not exposed you, my dearest father? Can you—will you ever forgive me for all this?"

"Have we not had much to pardon—much to explain, on either side, already?" asked Mr. Hatfield, his voice now regaining its mildness—a mildness that was, however, mournfully subdued. "Well, then, my dear boy, give not way to these self-reproaches; for if I be anxious to obtain a certain knowledge of the full extent of these evils, it is only with the view of falling into no error and committing no oversight in extricating both yourself and me from the embarrassments that surround us. To return, then, to the immediate subject of our discourse—these women know all?"

"All—every thing," replied Charles. "In that blind infatuation—"

"Compose yourself, my dear boy," said Mr. Hatfield, in a voice slightly indicative of paternal authority. "Respecting the promissory note you gave the money-lender *Percival*—"

"Oh! now I shrink indeed from telling you the truth," interrupted Charles, his countenance glowing with shame and confusion; "and yet—faithful to my promise—I will not mislead you. The note of hand to which you allude was signed—*Vicount Marston*!"

"If I recollect aright," said Mr. Hatfield, "the account of the murder, as reported in the newspapers, states distinctly that no papers nor documents of any kind were found in the victim's house—the tin-box, in which such things were probably kept, having been emptied of its contents. The assassin or assassins, then, whoever they may be, possessed themselves of all the poor man's papers—and your note doubtless amongst the rest. In this case, we shall probably

never hear of it again. But—knowing the two women as you do—can you believe that *they* were the murderesses?

"No—I cannot think it!" exclaimed Charles. "What motive could they have had? Certainly not to recover my promissory note, since they believed me to be the heir to immense wealth;—and as they no doubt fancied that their connexion with me would place ample resources at their command, they were not likely to peril their lives by killing the man for the sake of the money which he might have had in the house. Besides, when I saw them on the following morning, there was no confusion—nothing on their part to denote that they had so recently committed a horrible crime; and, depraved—wicked—unscrupulous as they evidently are, I cannot bring myself to imagine that they could meet me with calm and unruffled countenances, only a few hours after having accomplished a midnight murder."

"Let us hope that they are indeed innocent," said Mr. Hatfield solemnly. "And now I will explain to you the manner in which I propose to deal with this *Perdita*."

The interest and attention of Charles redoubled, if possible, as his father uttered these words.

"Thank heaven," continued Mr. Hatfield, "I possess wealth; and by means of gold, every thing can be accomplished with such mercenary adventuresses as these. *Perdita* shall receive a handsome sum of ready money, and a suitable income allowed her so long as she shall consent to dwell upon the continent, take any other name than that which you have unfortunately given her, and never more molest you."

But scarcely had Mr. Hatfield uttered these words,—and before his son had time to offer a single comment upon the proposed plan to be adopted—the door opened, and *Perdita* entered the room.

CHAPTER CLII.

THE FATHER, THE SON, AND THE SON'S WIFE.

THE magnificent creature whom Mr. Hatfield now beheld for the first time, had perhaps never shone to greater advantage than on the present occasion.

She was absolutely dazzling—radiant—supernally grand, in all the glory of her queen-like beauty.

A French cambric wrapper, worked, and trimmed with costly lace, enveloped her form—fitting loosely, yet defining all the rich contours of her voluptuous shape;—and, though—having risen hurriedly almost immediately after awakening—she had no stays on, the natural firmness of her bust maintained its rounded proportions without any artificial support.

We have before said that her early initiation in a career of wantonness and the licentious course which she had pursued in Australia, had marred nothing of the first freshness of youth in respect to her;—and thus, though her wrapper was so far open at the bosom as to show that the glowing orbs of snowy whiteness were unsustained by the usual article of apparel, their contours were of virgin roundness.

Her dark brown hair had been hastily gathered up in two massive bands, silken and glossy, and serving as a frame to set off the height and width of the fine forehead, which rose above brows arching majestically, and almost meeting between the temples.

Her cheeks were slightly flushed with a carnation

tint;—her large grey eyes shone brilliantly, and appeared to give a halo of light to her whole countenance;—her moist red lips, parted with a smile of happiness and satisfaction, revealed the teeth so perfectly regular and of such pearly whiteness;—and her neck arched proudly and with swan-like grace.

One arm hung negligently, but slightly rounded, by her side: the other, thrown across her form just above the waist, kept the folds of the wrapper together:—and from beneath the skirt of that elegant, tasteful garment, of almost gauzy lightness and transparency, peeped forth the beautifully-modeled ankles in their flesh-coloured silk stockings, and the charming feet in their embroidered slippers of pale blue satin.

Though, as we have before stated, she was not above the middle height, yet there was something truly regal and commanding in her deportment—something more than graceful and less than imperious in her carriage, and, altogether, she appeared a being to whom it would not be idolatrous to kneel.

On the contrary,—prejudiced and naturally invertebrate as he was against her, Mr. Hatfield could well comprehend, even at the first glance which he threw upon her, how a young man of enthusiastic disposition and keen sensibility might love that enchanting creature with a devotion amounting to a worship.

The apartment was large and beautifully furnished,—the uncarpetted floor of oak was polished almost to mirror-like brightness,—vast looking-glasses, set in splendid frames, were suspended to the walls,—a massive or-molu time-piece and handsome porcelain vases filled with flowers freshly gathered that morning, stood on the mantel,—and through the casements, which reached from the ceiling to the floor, and which were only partially shaded by muslin curtains, flowed the gorgeous lustre of the cloudless sun, so that the room seemed filled with a transparent and impalpable haze of gold-dust.

Thus the whole aspect of that large and lofty apartment was magnificent and rich, bright and joyous;—and, had the minds of the father and son at the instant been in a different mood, they would have felt thrilled with admiration and delight at the presence of the magnificent creature who now entered an atmosphere so congenially glorious and sunny.

It seemed as if the beauteous being herself were surrounded with a golden halo,—as if the perfume of the freshly gathered flowers were the delicious fragrance of her breath,—as if the delicate feet and ankles bore her glancingly along a polished surface which she scarcely appeared to touch; while the immense mirrors multiplied the voluptuous form, as though other and kindred hours were moving about in attendance on their queen.

The effulgence of the warm sun played on her shining hair, as if a glory sat on that exquisitely shaped head,—gave additional brightness to the eyes that flashed with the natural fire of joy,—and rendered the fine and faultless countenance radiant and dazzling in its surpassing beauty.

Were that a room in a palatial dwelling,—were it an empress making her appearance,—and were the two men courtiers awaiting her presence, the effect could not have been more grand—more striking,—and the courtiers would have fallen on their knees in mute adoration of a being that seemed almost divine!

But, alas! circumstances marred all those fine effects which the transcendent charms of a lovely woman might have produced;—for the soul of this woman corresponded not with her captivating exterior,—it



was dark and hideous—inspiring horrible thoughts, and suggesting ideas of a nature so sinister, sombre, and gloomy, as to throw into the shade all the glory of the outward loveliness.

But, unsuspecting of the storm which was about to explode against her, Perdita entered that room;—and the influence of a night of love and voluptuousness and of elysian dreams lingered upon her countenance in the smile that it wore.

She had slept for nearly an hour after Charles Hatfield had risen so noiselessly from her side in the nuptial couch;—and when she at length awoke, she imagined that her young husband had been unwilling to disturb her when he himself arose. Nevertheless, she determined to seek him ere she passed through the routine of the toilette;—and hastily fastening up her hair, and assuming a slight apparel, she had proceeded to the sitting-room where she supposed him to be.

And there indeed he was: but not alone!

Still, when Perdita, on first entering the apartment, beheld *another person* with him whom she sought, she had no suspicion of the real truth, but imagined it must be some friend who had found out her husband's residence in Paris and had perhaps called to congratulate him on his bridal.

Thus was it that her countenance wore that delicious expression of pleasure and satisfaction, as she advanced towards Charles and *that other*;—and it was not until she was within a few paces of them, that she observed the foreboding looks which they cast upon her—even the aversion and the hate with which they *both* regarded her!

Then she stopped suddenly short, her countenance undergoing an immediate change—the smile disappearing, and giving place to an expression of proud defiance and haughty contempt; though she was still unconscious of the nature of the storm that she saw lowering so ominously.

“Charles, who is this person?” she demanded, indicating Mr. Hatfield with a movement of the head, accompanied by a slight inflection of the whole form—a gesture which would have become a queen.

“My father,” answered the young man quietly;—and he turned away towards the mantel-piece.

For an instant Perdita seemed shocked by this announcement;—but in the next moment, as the thought swept across her brain that it was impossible for Mr. Hatfield to know aught seriously detrimental to her character, she crossed the room in a majestic manner, and, laying her long taper fingers gently upon her

husband's arm, said, "Is it possible that the remonstrances of your father should have induced you to repent of this alliance,—you, who have sworn to love and cherish me in spite of parents and all the world beside?"

"When a man discovers that he has taken a reptile to his bosom," said Charles, the words hissing through his almost set teeth, "he flings it away from him. He ought to crush it beneath his heel!"

The last sentence was added after a moment's pause, and ere Perdita, who was astounded at the tone, and manner, and words of her husband, had regained the power of utterance so as to enable her lips to shape a comment or a reply.

"Is it to me that this insulting allusion applies?" she demanded at length—her countenance becoming ashy pale, and her lips quivering with the rage which she still sought to subdue.

"It is to you that I addressed myself," exclaimed Charles, now turning round and confronting the woman whom he had lately loved with such madness, and whom he now loathed with such savage aversion. "Vile—polluted—wanton thing," he cried, unabashed—undismayed by the lightning glances that flashed from her wildly dilating orbs: "the mask is torn from your face as the film from my eyes—and I am no longer your dupe, though, alas! I am perhaps still your victim! I know all—all—every thing,—the depravity of your past life—the hypocrisy of your present course:—all—all is now revealed to me. Your evil fame has followed you from beyond the seas;—it overtook you on the Marine Parade at Dover;—and it now attaches itself for ever to your steps, in the capital of France. Oh! my God—how cruelly, how miserably have I been deceived!"

And the young man darted a glance of savage hatred upon the woman who, pale and motionless as a marble statue, seemed petrified by the crushing truths that fell upon her ears.

Meantime Mr. Hatfield stood aloof, with folded arms—listening to the words that his son addressed to Perdita, and marking their effect.

"That you were born in Newgate—of a woman condemned to death for felony, and then reprieved,—this was no fault of your's," continued Charles, in a slow and measured tone—for he sought as much as possible to prevent a violent outburst of the rage that boiled within him:—"that the mystic name of *Perdita*, or 'The Lost One,' should have proved prophetic of your after life, you also could not help;—and that, amongst the felony of New South Wales, you should have become polluted—contaminated—and indeed *lost*, was perhaps a fate for which you are rather to be pitied than blamed. But here all sympathy ceases for you! Wherefore, on your arrival in England, did you seek me out to become your victim?—wherefore did your wretched mother dog my footsteps—across me—ensnare me into a discourse to which she imparted a mysterious interest—and then lead me into your presence? Why did you open the battery of all your meretricious charms upon me?—why cast your spells around me—wean my affections from an estimable young lady who is white as snow compared with the blackness of your soul—and lead me on until the crowning act of ruin was accomplished yesterday in the Chapel of the British Embassy?"

"I have heard you with patience—and, if you possess the generosity of a man and an Englishman,

you will give me an equal share of your attention," said Perdita, who, during her husband's address, had recovered all her wonted presence of mind—though her heart was wounded in its very core. "It is true that I was born in Newgate—that I deceived you respecting the origin of my Christian name—and that I escaped not the contamination of a far-off clime into which my sad destinies threw me. But when my mother, for reasons which I think she made satisfactorily apparent to you, sought an interview with you,—and when that circumstance introduced us to each other, did you not proffer me your friendship of your own accord?—did you not next assure me that this sentiment had changed to the feeling of love?—did you not implore me, almost on your knees, to become your wife at the altar—I, who in the first instance had proposed and agreed to become your mistress only? And then you dare to speak of our marriage as the crowning act of your ruin,—that marriage on which you yourself so imploringly—so earnestly—so solemnly insisted?"

"Oh! yes—because I deemed you pure and virtuous!" exclaimed Charles, almost gnashing his teeth as the words of Perdita reminded him of all the arts which she had practised to ensnare him—all the sophistry she had used to make herself appear in his eyes every thing that she was *not*.

"Was it to be supposed," she asked, impatiently and haughtily,—that shameless Perdita!—"was it to be supposed that I would reveal to you the incidents of my past life? And yet, even if I had, I do firmly and sincerely believe that you would still have made me your wife!"

"No—never, never!" cried Charles, his voice and manner expressing loathing, abhorrence, and indignation. "But let us not bandy words thus. I have intelligence which—lost and depraved as you are, and vilely as you have treated me—I nevertheless grieve to have to convey to you,—for I cannot, even in my anger and hate, forget that you are a woman."

"And that intelligence?" demanded Perdita, suffering not her countenance nor her manner to betray the deep curiosity and the suspense which her husband's words had suddenly excited within her bosom.

"The intelligence regards your mother, and explains her mysterious disappearance at Dover," continued Charles, who, as well as his father, now intently watched the young woman's countenance.

"Speak on!" she said, not a muscle of her face betraying any emotion:—and still she stood motionless and statue-like.

"Your mother was arrested on suspicion of being concerned in the murder of Mr. Percival, the money-lender whom you represented to me as the discounter of my promissory note;—and, as Charles uttered these words in slow and measured tones, he maintained his eyes fixed upon the pale but unchanging features of his wife.

"Then my mother has been accused of *that* whereof she is innocent," said Perdita, in a voice so firm and resolute, yet devoid of passion, that her hearers felt convinced she was practising no artifice now. "It is true that Percival discounted your note: I myself received the money—and you can doubtless give your father a satisfactory explanation relative to the expenditure of the portion that is gone. If Percival have indeed met his

death by violent means, it was not by the hands of two weak women that he fell."

"Thank heaven! *this* crime at least cannot, then, be attributed to you," said Charles. "There must be enough upon your conscience without *that*!"

"And have you nothing wherewith to reproach yourself?" demanded Perdita, still maintaining that majesty of demeanour which, with her now marble-like features, her motionless attitude, and her fine form enveloped in drapery that fell in classic plaits and graceful folds around her, gave her the air of a statue of Diana the Huntress or of Juno Queen of Heaven. "Have you inflicted no injury upon me?" she asked. "Yes—yes: and I will convince you that your conduct has been far from blameless in that respect. You loved me—loved me almost from the first instant that you beheld me. Your's was not a tranquil—serene—and sickly sensation: it was a fury—a wild passion—a delirium—a species of hurricane of the strongest, most fervent emotions. I was all—every thing to you: parents—family—friends,—Oh! you cared for none of these in comparison with me. The holiest ties you would have broken—the most sacred bonds you would have snapped—the most solemn obligations you would have violated, sooner than have resigned your hope of possessing me! All this is true—and you know it. Your love amounted to a madness—a frenzy, capable of the most unheard-of sacrifices, and as likely to hurry you into the most desperate extremes. For had I provoked your jealousy, you would have murdered me: had I fled and abandoned you, you would have pined to death—or committed suicide. In fine, your's was no common love—no ordinary affection. Poets never dreamt and novelists never depicted a love so boundless—so absorbing—so immense as your's. And what could result from such a love as this? The consequence was inevitable;—and that consequence was that I, who had never loved before, received into my soul a transfusion of the spirit that animated you. You were so happy in your love, that my imagination doubtless longed to revel in the same paradise which you had created for yourself;—and I was taught by you to love as profoundly and as well. In a word, you ensnared my heart—you obtained a hold upon my affections; and, as there is a living God above us! I swear that when you led me to the altar, you loved me not better than I loved you. And this love which I experienced for you, would have made me a good wife—a sincere friend—a conscientious adviser. I should have entered upon a new existence; and my soul would have become purified. True it is that I gave to the marriage-bed a body that was polluted and unchaste: but I gave also a heart that was wholly and solely thine;—and from the instant that our hands were united by the minister of God, it would have proved as impossible for me to have played the wanton with another as that the infant child should harbour thoughts of villainy and murder. Now you have learnt the antecedents of my life—and your love is suddenly changed into hatred. But did you not take me for better or worse?—did you not wed me, because you loved me?—did you not espouse me for myself alone? Oh! you should pity me for the past—and cherish me at present and for the future: and your conscience tells you thus much even now!"

Charles Hatfield, who had listened with deep and solemn interest,—for his soul was absolutely en-

chained by this strange display of natural eloquence,—now shook his head impatiently.

"No! Then mark how fatal your love will have proved to me," exclaimed Perdita. "You cast me off—you put me away from you;—and yet you cannot give me back the heart which you have ensnared. Wherefore—wherefore did you bring to bear upon me the influence of your ardent love, unless you were prepared to make every sacrifice unto the end? I am young—I am beautiful—and I might gain a high and a proud position by means of marriage: but, no—I am chained to you—and you are intent upon discarding me! Now reflect well on the probable consequences of this proceeding on your part," continued Perdita, her melodious voice gathering energy, and a tinge of rose-bud hue appearing on her cheeks and gradually deepening into a flush,—while her eyes shone with a lustre that gave an almost unearthly radiance to her entire countenance. "reflect well, I say," she repeated, "on the probable consequences of the resolution which you have taken. As your wife, and dwelling with you as such should have clung to you—loved you with unceasing devotion—exerted all my powers to retain your esteem. Nay, more—in time I should have won your good opinion by my *actions*—as I had already secured it by my *words*. Amongst the entire community of women, there would have been none more exemplary than I;—and thus your love would have proved a saving influence—valuable to society at large, and blessed by the Almighty Ruler whom you worship. But how changed are these prospects! You are prepared to discard me—to thrust me away from your presence—to push me out into the great world, where I must battle for myself. *There* I shall find my circumstances terribly—fearfully altered from what they were before your lips whispered the delicious but fatal tale of love in mine ears. For if I retain your name, I thereby proclaim myself a divorced wife: if I pass myself off as an unmarried young lady, I shall not dare to accept proposals for an alliance, be it never so advantageous—because the fear of a prosecution for bigamy would hang over my head. Will you, then, forgive me for the past, and receive me as an affectionate wife and reformed woman to your arms?—or will you send me forth, an outcast—with ruined hopes, blighted prospects, and a damaged character?"

Gradually, as she approached the end of this speech, Perdita had suffered her voice to lose its energy and its firmness, and grow tender, pathetic, and mournful—until at the close of her appeal, it became tremulously plaintive and profoundly touching,—while her form simultaneously relaxed from its statue-like rigidity—the head slightly inclining, the body bending in the least degree forward, and the hands joining as the last words fell from her lips.

For an instant Charles was about to yield to the appeal commenced with a dignity so well assumed, and terminated with a tenderness so well affected; but, at the critical moment, Mr. Hatfield, who had hitherto remained a mute spectator of this extraordinary scene, stepped forward, exclaiming, "No—no; a compromise of such a nature is impossible! Charles, the sophistry is indeed most specious—but the peril is likewise tremendous!"

"Yes—yes," cried the young man, instantly recovering his presence of mind: "I told you, father, that she was a Circe—a Syren,—and now you have ample proofs of the assertion."

While he was yet speaking, the appearance of Perdita underwent a rapid and signal change. She suddenly seemed to throw off the air of a suppliant, as if she were discarding a mean garment that was unbecoming and abhorrent: her cheeks acquired a deeper flush, her eyes a more dazzling brilliancy;—the blue veins in her forehead grew more clearly traceable—her nostrils dilated—her lips wreathed into an expression of sovereign disdain—and her entire form appeared to expand into more majestic proportions.

A moment before she had seemed a voluptuous beauty, in the melting softness of an appeal for pardon at love's shrine: now she stood in the presence of the father and son,—proud—haughty—and magnificent as Juno,—and armed with authority to wield the lightning-shafts and the thunderbolts of Jove.

"Let us think of peace no more," she exclaimed: "but war—terrible war,—war to the knife! Cast me off—thrust me from you—denounce me as the wanton Perdita—proclaim me to be born of a felon, and to have first seen the light in Newgate,—do all this if you will: I shall not the less remain your wife, Charles—and, as your wife, I am ennobled,—I bear the proud title of *Viscountess Marston*!"

"Miserable woman," cried Mr. Hatfield: "you deceive yourself—even as Charles has been by himself deceived! For know that he is illegitimate——"

"'Tis false! you would delude—you would mislead me!" exclaimed Perdita, who, in spite of the tone of confidence in which she uttered these ejaculations, was painfully affected by the revelation that had elicited them.

"It is true—too true!" cried Charles, with a bitterness that carried conviction to the mind of Perdita.

"Then if I cannot proclaim myself to be *Viscountess Marston*," she said, concealing with a desperate and painful effort the shock which she had just experienced,—"*I can still have my revenge against you both;—for if my mother were a felon, Charles, your father was the same—if I were born in Newgate, the author of your being has passed through the hands of the public executioner!*"

"Friend—wretch!" ejaculated the young man, springing forward as if about to dash her on the floor and trample her under foot.

But the hand of his father suddenly grasped him as in an iron vice, and held him back; and all the while Perdita had maintained her ground—shrinking not a step, retreating not a pace.

"Coward!" she exclaimed, in a tone of ineffable contempt, as she kept her eyes—her large, shining grey eyes—fixed with disdain upon him whom she had lately loved so fervently and so well.

"Charles—Charles," said Mr. Hatfield, in an imploring voice, as he held his son firmly by both arms,—"*merit not by your actions that infamous woman's reproaches. I was prepared for what she dared to address to me——*"

"Oh! my dear father, this is terrible!" murmured the young man, who felt a faintness coming over him, as the words which Perdita had spoken concerning his parent still rang in his ears, and as he observed the deadly pallor which had spread over that parent's countenance.

"Compose yourself, Charles," said Mr. Hatfield, conducting him to a seat: then, turning round and recasting Perdita, he exclaimed, "Madam, let us

treat this most unpleasant affair as a purely business-matter: in short, let us effect an arrangement which may be proper and suitable for both parties—the basis being the immediate separation of yourself and my son."

"Yes—I have no longer any objection to offer to that proposal," said Perdita; "for after his attempt to strike me, I despise even more than I hate him."

"And just now," exclaimed the young man, starting from his seat, "you declared that I possessed your heart. Oh! I am rejoiced that you have admitted your hatred towards me—because I have thereby received another proof of your boundless duplicity."

Perdita smiled scornfully—but deigned no reply.

"Leave the affair in my hands, Charles," said Mr. Hatfield, in an authoritative tone: then, observing with satisfaction that his son returned to his seat, the father addressed himself once more to Perdita, who remained standing near the mantel. "Madam," he continued, "you have already heard that the bright hopes in which your husband had indulged, and the golden visions which he had conjured up, are all destroyed by the revelation which I have this morning made to him,—the revelation of the one fatal secret—his illegitimacy! Instead, then, of being *Viscount Marston* at present and *Earl of Ellingham* in perspective, he is still plain and simple *Charles Hatfield*—and so he is likely to remain. By consequence, you, madam, are *Mrs. Hatfield*—and not *Viscountess Marston* now, nor with any chance of becoming *Countess of Ellingham*. If you require proofs of what I am now telling you, I can exhibit them at once;—for, knowing beforehand the nature of the delusions in which my son had cradled his fancy, and the necessity of destroying them, I set out on this journey provided with several papers of importance. For instance," continued Mr. Hatfield, taking forth his pocket-book; "here is the certificate of my marriage with Lady Georgiana Hatfield—and you may at once perceive by the date how impossible it is that our son could have been born in wedlock."

While thus speaking, Mr. Hatfield had sunk his voice to the lowest audible whisper—so that Perdita alone heard him: for the revelation he was making was of a most painful nature, although rendered imperatively necessary under the circumstances.

Perdita glanced rapidly over the certificate, and bit her lip with a vexation she could no longer conceal;—for that document effectually set at rest the question of her husband's legitimacy or illegitimacy; and she indeed found that instead of gaining a noble title by marriage, she had formed an alliance with an obscure young man who was dependant on his parents for even a morsel of bread.

"It now remains for you to decide whether you choose to proclaim yourself, wherever you go, to be the wife of Mr. Charles Hatfield;—or whether you will think fit to resume your maiden name—or any other that may suit your purposes—and maintain a strict silence henceforth relative to this most unfortunate alliance."

Thus spoke Mr. Hatfield;—and Perdita appeared to be plunged in deep thought for a few minutes.

"And what are the conditions you annex to those alternatives?" she asked at length, fixing her eyes, which now shone with a subdued and sombre lustre, in a penetrating manner upon Mr. Hatfield's coun-

tenance—as if she would *there* read the reply to her question even before his lips could frame it.

"If you proclaim yourself my son's wife," said he, meeting her look firmly and speaking resolutely, "I shall spare no expense in bringing the whole transaction before the proper tribunals in England, with the ultimate view of enabling him to obtain a divorce; and in this case I should not allow you one single farthing—no, not even to save you from starvation."

"And have you not reflected," asked Perdita, in a tone and with a gesture indicative of superb disdain,—“have you not reflected that a judicial investigation must inevitably lay bare all the tremendous secrets connected with yourself and family?—for you cannot suppose, that if you commence the part of a persecutor against *me*, I shall evince any forbearance towards *you*? No—it would be, as I said just now, a terrible warfare—a warfare to the very death,—and in which human ingenuity would rack itself to discover and set in motion all possible means of a fearful vengeance."

"I have weighed all this," said Mr. Hatfield, calmly; "and I have resolved to dare exposure of every kind—nay, to sacrifice myself, if necessary—in order to save my son."

"And now for the conditions annexed to the second alternative?" said Perdita, maintaining a remarkable coolness and self-possession, although in the secret recesses of her soul she harboured the conviction that the triumph was as yet on the other side, and that she must end by accepting the best terms she could obtain.

"If you will sign a paper, undertaking never to represent yourself as my son's wife," said Mr. Hatfield,—“never to molest him in any way—never to return to England, but to fix your abode in some continental state,—and lastly, that you will retain inviolably secret not only the fact of this most inauspicious marriage, but likewise all matters connected with myself and family,—if you affix your name to such a document," continued Mr. Hatfield, "I will immediately pay you the sum of one thousand pounds, and I will allow you five hundred pounds a-year so long as the convention shall be duly kept on your part."

"And should you happen to die before me?" said Perdita, her manner now being of that cold, passionless nature which rendered it impossible for Mr. Hatfield to conjecture what sort of an impression his alternatives and their conditions had made upon her mind: "for you must remember," she added, "that such an event is to be reckoned upon in the common course of nature."

"Granted," was the prompt reply. "My will shall contain a clause enjoining and empowering my executors to continue the payment of your income, from a fund especially sunk for the purpose, so long as your conduct shall be in accordance with the conditions stipulated."

"And am I to understand that if I leave your son unmolested, I shall remain unmolested also?" demanded Perdita.

"I scarcely comprehend you," said Mr. Hatfield, evidently perplexed.

"I mean," replied Perdita, in a slow and measured tone, so that her words could not be misapprehended nor their sense mistaken,—“I mean that if I go forth into the world again as Miss Fitzhardinge, or Miss Fitzgerald, or any other name I may choose to take,—and if, receiving a suitable offer of marriage,

I contract such an alliance,—I mean, then, to ask whether I may calculate upon acting thus with impunity at your hands?"

"My God! what interest can I have to molest you in any way?" cried Mr. Hatfield. "Would to heaven that you could both of you sign a paper effectually emancipating you from any claim on each other in respect to this accursed—this miserable marriage."

"You are now speaking with unnecessary excitement, sir, after having reproved your son for the same fault—and also after having yourself proposed to discuss this matter in a purely business-like manner," said Perdita, her lip curling slightly with an expression of scornful triumph.

"True, madam," observed Mr. Hatfield, who, throughout this dialogue—since his son had remained seated apart—had treated Perdita with a perfect though frigid courtesy: "I was in error to give way to any intemperance of tone or manner—and I ask your pardon. You have now heard all that I have to propose—"

"And I accept the conditions," she said. "Indeed, I shall be happy for this scene to terminate as speedily as possible."

"A few minutes' more will suffice, madam," observed Mr. Hatfield. "If you will have the kindness to provide me with writing-materials, I shall not be compelled to intrude on you much longer."

Perdita bowed slightly: and quitted the room,—not in haste—but with stately demeanour and measured tread, as if she were merely a consenting party to a business-transaction, and not a vanquished one on whom conditions had been imposed.

The moment the door closed behind her, Mr. Hatfield said to his son, "That woman is indeed a prodigy of beauty, and a very demon at heart. What an angelic creature would she have been were she as pure and virtuous as she is lovely!"

"Ah! my dear father," returned Charles, who appeared to be completely spirit-broken and overwhelmed by the terrible occurrences and revelations of this memorable morning,—“you can now comprehend, perhaps,—at least to some extent,—the nature of that infatuation which I experienced in respect to this singular being. The world has never seen her equal for beauty and for wickedness."

"The sooner you are removed from the sphere of her fatal influence, the better," observed Mr. Hatfield. "When she re-appears, do you quit the room, and hasten as much as possible your preparations to depart with *me*."

"Fear not, my dear father," responded Charles, "that I shall, of my own accord, interpose any delay. But the papers—she will surrender them—"

"As a matter of course. You may have observed," added the parent, "that, in spite of her haughty coldness, she was subdued and vanquished."

At this instant the door opened, and Perdita returned, bearing her writing-desk in her hands.

Her countenance, though flushed, and thus presenting a striking contrast to its colourless appearance some time before, gave no indication of the nature of her feelings: impossible was it to judge of the emotions that might occupy her bosom, by that which is wont to be denominated the mirror of the soul.

Her step was still measured and stately, while her attitude was gracefully and, as she advanced towards the table—passing through the golden flood of lustre that filled the room—the waving of her

white drapery gave an additional charm to the undulating nature of her motion.

From beneath her richly fringed lids, while affecting to keep her eyes half bent downward as if on the rose-wood desk which she carried, she darted a rapid glance at Mr. Hatfield—and then her look dwelt the least thing more lingeringly on her husband, who had risen from his seat and was leaning on the mantel.

By a natural effect of curiosity,—perhaps also in obedience to a last remaining particle of that immense love which he had so lately borne her,—Charles Hatfield likewise glanced towards her from beneath his half-closed lids, and also while he wished to appear as if fixing his gaze downward:—thus their looks met—unavoidably met,—and the blood rushed to the countenance of the young man, as he felt overwhelmed with shame, and bitterly indignant with himself, for having given way to this momentary proof of weakness.

On the other hand, a smile of triumph,—though faint, and perceptible only to her husband—not to his father, who saw not with eyes that had once looked love towards her,—curled the rich red lips of Perdita; and she thought within herself, “Even in the bitterness of your hate, the power of my charms revives a spark, albeit an evanescent one, of the fires that were wont to burn within your breast in adoration of me!”

All this dumb show—this mute expression of the strangest, and yet the most natural feelings on either side, occupied but a few moments;—and then, as Perdita placed the desk upon the table, Charles turned to quit the room.

“Here are writing materials, sir,” she said to Mr. Hatfield, not choosing to appear to notice the departure of her husband; for all the pride of this extraordinary woman was aroused to a degree which in a being of lesser energy would have been totally incompatible with the frightful exposure that had been made of her depravity and deceit.

But the consciousness of possessing the loveliness of an Angel rose superior to the shame of being proved to be endowed with the profligacy of a Demon: the knowledge that she was so pre-eminently beautiful was for her a triumph and a glory which, in her estimation, threw into the shade the certainty of her wantonness and guile;—she flattered herself and fancied that, even were her true character revealed in its proper colours to all the world, the darkness of her soul would be absorbed and rendered invisible by the transcendent brilliancy of her outward charms.

Thus, even in the presence of the husband to whom she was unmasked, and of the indignant father who had unmasked her, the pride of her loveliness enabled her to maintain that haughty demeanour which we have explained;—for it was not Perdita who was likely to melt into tears—to supplicate for mercy—to acknowledge shame or remorse—or to kneel to those whom she now looked upon as her enemies. Unless, indeed, she had some grand object to accomplish, or some important end to gain;—and then she could veil her pride beneath an assumption of all the passions—all the emotions—and all the tender feelings which she might deem it expedient to affect. *It*

To return to the thread of our narrative.

“Here are writing materials, sir,” she remarked, as she placed the desk upon the table: then, drawing a chair near, she seated herself in a calm and

dignified manner, and with all the appearance of one who knew and felt that she had important business in hand.

Mr. Hatfield bowed—seated himself likewise—and proceeded to draw up a document including the conditions which he had already specified, and which the lady had agreed to.

While he was writing, Perdita kept her eyes fixed upon him, as if she could tell by the movement of the pen the very words it was forming, as the hand which held it travelled rapidly over the paper.

At length the document was finished; and Mr. Hatfield presented it to Perdita for her perusal. While she was engaged in reading it, he drew forth his pocket-book, and counted thence ten notes, each of a hundred pounds, upon the table.

“I have no objection to offer to this deed,” said Perdita, taking up the pen to sign it.

“Here is the amount promised,” said Mr. Hatfield; “and I will now give you an undertaking relative to the payment of the income which I have promised you.”

Perdita bowed coldly; and he immediately drew up the second paper.

“I must now request you to give me up all the private documents which my son placed in your hands for safe keeping,” observed Mr. Hatfield.

“They are in the upper part of that desk—and you can take them,” said Perdita, without the least hesitation; for she was naturally prepared for this demand, and had no object to serve in refusing it.

She then signed her undertaking, while Mr. Hatfield possessed himself of the documents and looked them carefully over to ascertain that none were missing.

Having satisfied himself on this head, he gave Perdita the money and the undertaking which he had prepared; and thus terminated this strange business.

“I have now a few observations to make,” said Perdita; “but they are not of a nature to revive any unpleasant discussion. They concern matters entirely personal to myself. Although I have declared—and emphatically declare again—that my mother is innocent of the crime on suspicion of which you inform me that she has been arrested, the judicial investigation will naturally lead to a most unpleasant exposure of her name. It is therefore probable that my interests and views may be served by a change of my name—as I shall not of course bear that which the marriage-ceremony of yesterday gave to me. Should I adopt such a course, I will acquaint you by letter with the fact—”

“Pardon me for interrupting you, madam,” said Mr. Hatfield; “but I shall seek not to become acquainted with any particulars that may hereafter concern you. Every quarter you can draw upon me, through any banker, in any part of the world where you may happen to be; and you are at liberty to use any name you may think fit—save one. I shall know that the draft is your’s; and you may rest assured that it will be duly honoured.”

“Then we have now no more to say to each other,” observed Perdita, rising from her seat, and mechanically drawing the muslin wrapper around her, in such a manner that it displayed all the full proportions of her fine figure.

Mr. Hatfield bowed a negative,—then immediately added, “But perhaps you will have no objection, madam, to remain here until my son shall have made his preparations for departure?”

"Oh! certainly," cried the young woman, her lip curling haughtily. "Think not, sir, that I shall condescend to use any arts in order to win him back to me;—although well aware am I that if I chose to do so, I should speedily behold him languishing at my feet."

Scarcely were these words uttered, when Rosalie entered the room, and addressing herself to Mr. Hatfield, said, "My master, sir, is waiting for you below."

The abigail, who was evidently at a loss to comprehend the nature of all that was going on,—though she saw enough to convince her that something very uncommon and unusual was taking place,—retired as soon as she had delivered this message;—and Mr. Hatfield, as he glanced towards Perdita while bowing to take his leave, observed that her countenance had again grown marble-like with pallor.

For now that the conviction that Charles was really gone was forced upon her mind, a pang of regret struck to her heart,—regret to lose one—the first—whom she had ever really loved;—and for a few moments she felt as if all her affection for him had suddenly revived with tenfold violence.

But this weakness on her part was speedily dissipated: her pride resumed its empire,—and she remembered likewise that her connexion with him had not only put her in possession of a large sum of ready money, but had likewise assured her of a handsome annual income for the remainder of her days.

Thus, almost before Mr. Hatfield had reached the room-door, the colour had returned to her cheeks,—and her countenance became radiant with triumph,—for she murmured to herself, as she contrasted her present position with that in which she had first set foot on European soil, "It is my beauty hat has done all this!"

CHAPTER CLIII.

FATHER AND SON.

MR. HATFIELD found his son waiting for him in the office-room; and, entering the *citadine*, or one-horse hackney-coach, in which the former had arrived, they proceeded to the hotel at which he had put up, and which was in the Place Vendôme.

It was now past eleven o'clock; for the incidents related in the two preceding chapters, had occupied two full hours:—and, during that interval, how many revelations had been made—what changes of feeling effected—what new emotions engendered—what bright visions destroyed!

Yet such is human life;—and two minutes, instead of two hours, are often sufficient to hurl down the finest fabrics of happiness which the imagination has ever built up in the realms of fancy or the sphere of reality.

On arriving at the hotel in the Place Vendôme, the father and son repaired to the apartment occupied by the former; and Charles threw himself on a sofa, as if exhausted and overwhelmed by the terrible excitement he had undergone that morning.

Mr. Hatfield related to him all that had passed between Perdita and himself after the young man had quitted the room; and Charles was rejoiced,—if rejoiced he could be in the midst of the strange

thoughts and reminiscences which crowded upon him,—to learn that the family papers were secure in his father's possession.

"And those papers shall no longer be a source of alarm and embarrassment to those whom they so deeply regard," said Mr. Hatfield, when he had brought his brief narrative to a conclusion: then ringing the bell, he ordered the waiter who answered the summons to bring him a lighted candle.

This command was speedily obeyed; and when the domestic had retired, Mr. Hatfield, having thrown all the documents upon the hearth, set them alight. While they were consuming,—those precious papers which were worth an Earldom to him, did he choose to avail himself of the proofs which they contained—both himself and his son watched them with a fixed gaze, but with different emotions. For Charles sighed as he thought of the bright dreams which the perusal of those papers had so lately excited in his imagination; and Mr. Hatfield experienced an indescribable relief in witnessing their destruction.

"Now," he exclaimed, in a tone of triumph, "no living soul can dispute my brother's right to the rank which he bears and the estates which he possesses! Nor think, Charles," he added, turning to his son, and speaking in a calmer and more measured voice,—“think not that it costs me a pang thus to dispose of these papers. The flame has died away—naught save a heap of tinder remains—and I have willingly and cheerfully resigned the power of ever doing mischief, or being made the instrument of wrong, towards a brother to whom I owe so much. But enough of this: and now tell me, Charles, in details as ample as you can bring your mind to endure, the whole particulars of your unfortunate connexion with these women, in order to convince me that nothing more remains to be accomplished to rid ourselves completely of them. For you must remember that though we have managed to dispose of the daughter, the mother still possesses a knowledge of many secrets which we would not have revealed."

Charles immediately complied with his father's request, and narrated how Mrs. Fitzhardinge had accosted him in the street,—how she had spoken mysteriously, and thereby induced him to accompany her to Suffolk Street,—how he had there found himself in the presence of Perdita,—and how Mrs. Fitzhardinge on a subsequent occasion mentioned certain family matters evincing her knowledge of special secrets which she alleged to have been revealed to her by the gipsy Miranda.

"Then it was not from your lips that she first learnt the circumstances connected with myself?" said Mr. Hatfield, interrogatively.

"No: she particularly mentioned the gipsy as her authority for all she knew and alluded to," was the reply.

"But the gipsy was unaware of the fact of my mother's marriage with the late Earl of Rillingham," observed Mr. Hatfield; "and consequently she was ignorant of the legitimacy of my birth and the rights belonging to me thereupon."

"Oh! now a light breaks in upon my mind!" exclaimed Charles. "I remember that she was surprised when I told her that I was a young nobleman, as I did then really believe myself to be; and I likewise recollect that she afterwards spoke to me in a manner which, while pretending a full and perfect acquaintance with all our family affairs, led me

to give answers which were doubtless revelations of secrets to her. But all this did not strike me at the time: now, however, that the film has been removed from my eyes, I behold things in a clearer and truer light."

"Yes—and I also can understand this matter," said Mr. Hatfield, after a few moments' deep thought. "On their return to England, these women must have fallen in with Miranda: from her lips they heard enough to put them in possession of secrets which they doubtless intended to use for the purpose of extorting money from me through you. Then your infatuation in respect to the daughter, led you to speak to the mother in such a random, inconsiderate manner as to make her more fully aware of our family's position. Thus, while affecting to know all, she drew from you those details which filled up the chapters that were wanting in the history as Miranda originally told it. Yes—this must be the truth and the explanation of the whole affair;—and now it remains for us to hasten to England without delay, and, in case the old woman shall be relieved from the charge at present existing against her, purchase her secrecy and her exile in the same way as we have arranged with her daughter."

"But how can I face my mother?" asked Charles, in a tone expressive of the deepest grief: "how meet the Earl of Ellingham, whom I have sought to injure—and Lady Frances, to whom I have conducted myself in so scandalous a manner?"

"Now you recognise the impropriety of your behaviour towards her!" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield. "Oh! I am rejoiced to perceive that your heart is open to impressions of such a saving nature!"

"The incidents of this day have made me an altered man," said Charles, emphatically.

"Then am I almost happy that they have occurred!" cried his father. "The teachings have been bitter—bitter indeed, my poor boy; but the results may constitute an ample recompense alike to yourself and your parents. We have recovered a son—you have acquired an experience ten thousand times more valuable than the best precepts ever inculcated by mortal tongue."

"Oh! this is true—most true, father!" exclaimed Charles. "But you have not answered the questions—the painful questions—which I have put to you."

"First, then, with regard to your mother," responded Mr. Hatfield, "you know that she will receive you with open arms. In respect to the Earl, he must be told all—every thing; and you may count upon his generosity. But it is with reference to Lady Frances Ellingham, who loves you—from whom the causes of your flight have been carefully concealed—and who cannot be informed of your sad connexion with a profligate woman,—Oh! it is in regard to her, that I know not how to act—that I am bewildered—cruelly embarrassed!"

"Remember, my dear father," said Charles, in a tone of deep humility, "that henceforth I shall do your bidding in all things. You have but to speak—and I obey."

"Think not, my dear son," answered Mr. Hatfield, "that I shall claim of you a deference incompatible with your age and social position—or that I shall attempt to exercise an authority that may seem to have borrowed any taint of severity from the experience of the past. No: but I shall counsel and advise you as a friend—and in your best interest shall I ever speak. On our arrival in Lon-

don, we will not return immediately to Pall Mall—but we will repair to an hotel, whence I will send privately for the Earl; and his advice will assist me in respect to the course to be observed towards his amiable daughter. And now, Charles, do you feel yourself capable of commencing at once our journey homeward?—or are you too much exhausted—"

"No—no: let us depart from Paris without delay!" exclaimed the young man. "I have no longer any object in remaining here."

Mr. Hatfield rang the bell; and a waiter made his appearance.

"A chaise-and-four as speedily as possible," was the laconic command given; "and you must have our passports backed for Boulogne or Calais."

The domestic bowed and withdrew.

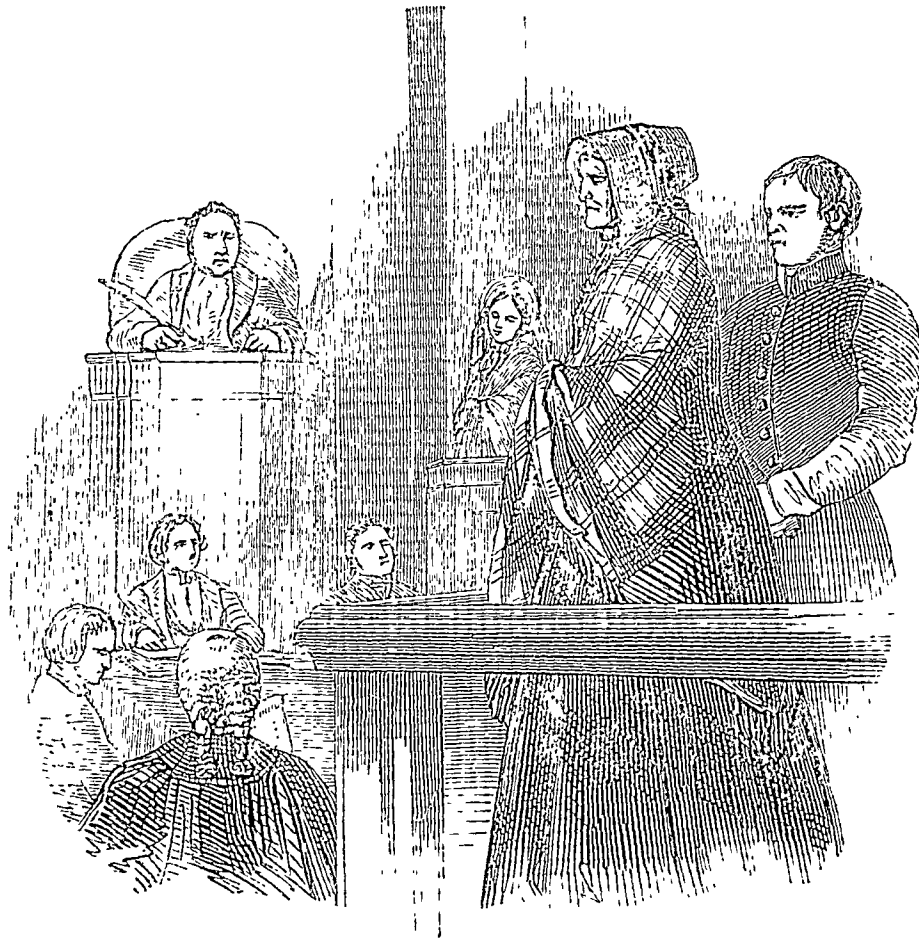
Two hours afterwards the father and son were seated together in the chaise, which was rolling rapidly along the road to Saint Denis.

"I will now give you some account of the adventures which I experienced in pursuit of you," said Mr. Hatfield, who felt that the silence previously existing between himself and Charles was growing painful: for they had not uttered a word from the moment they entered the vehicle until Mr. Hatfield now spoke—an interval of nearly half-an-hour.

"I shall be pleased to hear them," observed the young man, anxious to divert his thoughts from the painful topics that were naturally occupying them: "for I must confess that I am at a loss to conjecture how you happened to fall in with the officers at Dover, and how you were enabled to trace me to the hotel where you this morning found me."

"The explanation of all this is readily given," said Mr. Hatfield; and as the chaise was rolling along the unpaved part of the road, there was no effort necessary to make his voice audible. "I shall commence with the incidents of the morning on which you quitted London in company with the two females whose pernicious influence has worked so much mischief. You remember that a most painful interview took place between yourself and me in the library, and that you burst away—perhaps just at the moment when explanations might have arisen to convince you of the futility of your ambitious hopes and golden visions in respect to birth and title. Shortly after you thus left me, the Earl entered the room; and a conversation which took place, led to the mention of the secret papers. He sought for them in the recess to which he had consigned them—and they were gone. At the same moment I obtained the conviction that the *Annual Register* for a certain year, and containing a certain dreadful narrative, had been lately read. Then a light broke in upon the Earl and myself; and we penetrated the motives of the strange conduct you had recently observed towards your parents. At this juncture, Mr. Clarence Villiers made his appearance; and, on consulting him, we learnt to our dismay that the women who passed under the name of Fitzhardinge were his aunt and cousin,—Mrs. Slingsby, who was transported years ago for forgery—and Perdita, her illegitimate child, born in Newgate, a few weeks previous to her departure. You may conceive the anguish which we endured when we found that you had become connected with such women; and Villiers hastened to Suffolk Street to obtain an interview with you."

"Would to God that he had succeeded in finding me—that my departure with those wretches had



been only delayed a few minutes!" cried Charles, still a prey to the most harrowing feelings.

"Alas! you had already fled," continued Mr. Hatfield; "and when Villiers returned to communicate this fact, an instantaneous pursuit was resolved upon. Clarence took one road—the Earl another—and I chose the road to Dover. I was mounted on a good horse, and must have inevitably overtaken you before you had proceeded many miles, when, on turning an angle of the road, I suddenly encountered a light chaise-cart that was turning the corner at a furious rate. The shock was violent; and I was hurled from my horse with such force that I was stunned by the fall. When I recovered my senses I was lying on a bed at a small road-side tavern; and a candle was burning in the room. It was night: hours had elapsed since the accident which had occurred; and during that long interval I had remained senseless—unconscious of all that was passing. A surgeon had been sent for from Greenwich, near which place the accident occurred; and he was an ignorant quack who had adopted no effective measures to recover me. But nature had at length asserted her empire in that where medical mismanagement had necessarily failed to produce any good

result; and I recovered my powers of thought—only to experience the bitterest anguish at the delay that had taken place. Ill and suffering as I was, I endeavoured to rise, with the determination of pursuing my journey; but this was impossible. For in the first place I was too much exhausted to leave the couch on which I was thus helplessly stretched; and, secondly, I learnt, to my increased annoyance, that my horse was injured in a serious manner. To be brief, I resigned myself to the necessity of at least remaining a few hours longer in that place; and a deep sleep came over me. In the morning I awoke, much refreshed, though still suffering from the pain of the severe contusions that I had received. All hope of continuing my journey on horseback was destroyed; and I accordingly procured a post-chaise in which I hastened on to Dover. There I arrived in the afternoon; and by accident I put up at the same hotel where you and your female companions had stopped. On inquiring I heard that yourself and the young lady had departed for Calais in the morning, and that the old one had been arrested on her way to the port, in consequence of a communication received by electric telegraph from London. No steam vessel was to leave for France

until the following day; and I was therefore compelled to wait patiently at the hotel. Patiently, indeed! No—that was impossible;—for all these delays were maddening, under the circumstances. But I will not dwell at unnecessary length on any portion of my narrative—much less upon the nature of the feelings which I experienced at that time. In the evening I dined in the coffee-room—if the mere mockery of sitting down to table and eating nothing can be called dining; and, while I was thus seated at a repast which I did not touch, I was suddenly interested in a conversation which was taking place between two officers who were discussing a bottle of wine at an adjacent table.”

“Oh! I ought to have perceived that there was something mysterious and wrong in that adventure upon the Marine Parade!” cried Charles, literally savage with himself at his blindness and folly. “But I was so completely infatuated by that artful, designing creature—”

“I must implore you to compose yourself,” interrupted Mr. Hatfield, in an earnest but kind tone: “for if I am now relating to you all that occurred to me, it is only that you may become acquainted with every thing, and have nothing left behind as a cause for future excitement. Therefore I will be explicit with you respecting the substance of the conversation which was passing between those officers in the manner I have described. Indeed, you may conceive my astonishment when I overheard one of them mention the name of *Perdita*; for that is by no means a common one—and perhaps this woman is the only being on the face of the earth who bears it. I accordingly listened—and in a short time the whole adventure which had taken place on the Parade the evening before, became known to me. Then I addressed myself to the two officers, stating that I had overheard their remarks, apologising for my rudeness in listening, but excusing myself on the ground that the young gentleman whom they had seen with *Perdita* was nearly allied to me, and that I was, in fact, in pursuit of him. They assured me that no apology was necessary; and I joined them in conversation. Then was it that I learnt a dreadful tale of female depravity; for it appears that *Perdita* became indeed the ‘*Lost One*’ at a very early age, and that her favours were distributed in Sydney to any good-looking young man who might happen to please her fancy.”

“Vile—detested *Perdita*!” ejaculated Charles, almost gnashing his teeth with rage.

“Yes—you must know her character fully, my poor boy,” said Mr. Hatfield; “for fear that she should ever again endeavour to exercise her syren influence upon you.”

“Oh, such an attempt would be utter madness on her part!” cried Charles, now speaking with every symptom of the deepest indignation and even loathing. “But what more said the officers whom you thus singularly encountered?”

“It appears,” continued Mr. Hatfield, “that *Perdita* was not thoroughly depraved in the sense in which we allude to an unfortunate woman who plies her hideous trade for bread. No—she bartered not her charms for gold. Indeed, though very poor, she would scarcely ever receive any recompense from her favourites—unless delicately conveyed in the form of presents. But money she never took: her pride revolted at that;—and it was purely through the wantonness of her disposition and the burning ardour of her temper, that she plunged headlong into a career of licentiousness.”

“And I to have fallen the victim to such a polluted wretch!” exclaimed the young man.

“At Sydney,” continued Mr. Hatfield, “she was looked upon as a species of prodigy. Endowed with an intellect as powerful as her beauty was great, and possessing extraordinary natural abilities, she listened with eagerness to the conversation of those officers and other gentlemen who became her favourites, and treasured up all the information she could thus acquire. She was also fond of reading the newspapers sent from England, and all works treating of the mother-country and the principal nations of Europe; and thus she gleaned a vast amount of miscellaneous knowledge, fitting her to become a woman of the world. With singular facility, too, she studied and appropriated the gentility of gait, demeanour, and manners which she observed in her superiors; and the very bearing of the ladies in Sydney, as they walked abroad, was noticed and adopted by her. Thus even in her poverty, to which she clung rather than surrender up her independence by becoming a wife or a kept mistress—for she might have been either—even in her poverty, I say, there was an air of lofty pride and calm hauteur about her, which would have led a stranger to fancy that she had sprung from an aristocratic stock, whose family fortunes had decayed. Moreover, her spirit was indomitable and fiery; and she knew full well how to avenge an insult. Did she receive overtures from any one who was displeasing to her, she would reject them with scorn; and, if possible, she would punish the adventurous suitor, in one way or another, for his insolence in addressing her. It was her delight at times to throw around herself—her deeds—her words—and even her entire character, a veil of mystery, and to affect an eccentricity of habits and a singularity of manner which made many ignorant and credulous people imagine that she was a being of no common order. Amongst those who might be properly styled her equals, she was reserved, cold, and distant; and even to those whom, in the same sense, we may denominate her superiors, she demeaned herself condescendingly, as if conferring a favour on them by her presence. In her amours, she maintained this singular pride, as if she were a Catherine of Russia, inviting her lovers to her arms, but never yielding to an invitation that might come from them. In a word, this *Perdita* was looked upon as the most remarkable, and at the same time the most unintelligible—the most incomprehensible character at Sydney; and even the most respectable persons were anxious to have her pointed out to them, when they walked abroad. Endowed with such a splendid intellect—possessed of such rare and almost superhuman loveliness—robing herself, as it were, in mystery—and evincing so proud a spirit, as well as such an aptitude for the self-appropriation of the refinements and the etiquette of genteel breeding,—it cannot be wondered at if *Perdita* should have been regarded in no common light by the inhabitants of the penal settlement. But from all I have now told you, Charles, it is easy for you to comprehend how dangerous is the character of such a woman—how completely she must be the mistress of every art in the school of hypocrisy, guile, and deceit; and if I have been thus elaborate in my details respecting her—if I have thus minutely recapitulated all that I learnt from the two officers at Dover—it is simply to place you more effectually upon your guard with reference to that syren—”

"I have already said," interrupted Charles, speaking with the vehemence of sincerity and of deep conviction, "thou never—never couldst thou resume her empire over me! Oh! my dear father, the lesson has been too terrible not to have served as a warning; and sooner would I seek the embrace of a hideous serpent, than suffer myself to be allured back to the arms of Perdita. And—oh!" ejaculated the young man, a sudden reminiscence flashing to his mind, "I should have taken warning, days—and days ago; for I recollect a fearful dream which I had, and which I must now look upon as providential! Madman that I was to neglect so solemn a foreshadowing of the truth!"

"Compose yourself, Charles," cried Mr. Hatfield; "and now let me finish my narrative. I had reached that point which related to my accidental interview with the officers at Dover, where I was compelled to pass the night—a night of cruel and torturing suspense! Next morning, I crossed to Calais, and there I obtained a trace of you at Dessin's hotel. Without delay I took a post-chaise, and hurried on in pursuit. I reached Paris at five last evening, and put up at the hotel whence we started just now. But I had not any time to lose, for I felt convinced that you intended to marry Perdita. I accordingly hurried off to the British Embassy, either to know the worst, if the worst were indeed already accomplished—or to take any measures I could to anticipate the ceremony, in case it should not have been as yet performed. But I could not obtain any satisfactory intelligence; no one to whom I addressed myself was able to state whether certain persons whom I described had been married during the day or not. I drove to the dwelling of the chaplain—but he had gone a few miles into the country. I found out the abode of his clerk—but this official was likewise from home. Almost distracted, I sped to the Prefecture of Police to ascertain if it were possible to discover your address in Paris, knowing that the landlords of all hotels are under the necessity of making daily returns of the names of their lodgers to the proper authorities. But I found the Prefecture closed for the night; and I returned, exhausted with fatigue and disconsolate in mind, to the hotel. Summoning the *commissionaire*, I gave him the necessary instructions to make particular inquiries at the Prefecture, the moment that establishment should open in the morning. This he promised to do, and I retired to bed—but not to rest!"

"Oh! my dear father," exclaimed Charles, seizing his parent's hand, and pressing it with fervour to his lips, "how can you ever pardon me for all the uneasiness I have occasioned you?—and if you can, how shall I hope to receive the forgiveness of my mother, when she learns all the sorrow you have endured on my account?"

"It is not, perhaps, necessary that your mother should be made acquainted with *everything*," observed Mr. Hatfield, emphatically: "but all this will depend upon circumstances—especially on the results of our previous and private interview with Lord Ellingham. As for you and me, Charles, we have already forgiven each other everything," said Mr. Hatfield, in a solemn tone. "And now my narrative has reached its conclusion," he added; "for shortly after eight o'clock this morning the *commissionaire* came and informed me that he had

discovered the hotel where you were residing. You know the rest."

Charles sighed, but made no answer, and the journey was continued for a long time in profound silence.

CHAPTER CLIV.

MRS. FITZHARDINGE.

RETURN we now to Mrs. Fitzhardinge, whom the officers of justice had arrested at Dover, on suspicion of being concerned in the murder of Mr. Percival, the miser.

The old woman, when made acquainted with the cause of her apprehension, was completely thunder-struck; for, in truth, she had not even heard until that moment of the dreadful deed which had taken place. But the Dover constables who took her into custody, and who were in plain clothes, insisted upon her accompanying them to London; and, yielding to the imperious necessity with as good a grace as possible, Mrs. Fitzhardinge cherished the consolation that her innocence must inevitably become apparent when the case should undergo a magisterial investigation.

For a variety of reasons, she made no mention of her daughter and Charles, who, she doubted not, had embarked in safety; neither did she volunteer any explanations relative to her acquaintance with Mr. Percival, or the business which she had with him on the night when, as it appeared, the murder was committed. She had already in her life passed through the ordeal of arrest—examination at a police-court—committal—trial—and condemnation—aye, and expiation also; and she was well aware that unseasonable garrulity, or explanatory remarks inconsiderately volunteered, seldom benefit even the innocent person when unjustly accused. She accordingly shrouded herself, or, rather, took refuge in a complete silence, from which the officers did not seek to draw her, as they all proceeded together by railway to London.

On their arrival in the metropolis at a somewhat late hour in the afternoon, Mrs. Fitzhardinge was consigned to Clerkenwell prison, where she passed the night; and at ten o'clock on the following morning she was removed in a cab to Marylebone police-court, to undergo an examination relative to the serious charge existing against her.

The prisoner, who had retained counsel in her behalf, and made other arrangements for her defence, appeared perfectly cool and collected; and although the sinister expression of her countenance might have told somewhat in her disfavour, in the estimation of common observers, yet, to the eye of the experienced magistrate, it spoke not of guilt in this instance. Nevertheless, that very experience which he possessed taught him not to judge either way by outward appearances; and he therefore prepared himself to give the matter the most searching investigation.

The first witness examined was Mrs. Dyer, who deposed as follows:—"I occupy a house adjoining that of the deceased. At half-past eleven o'clock on the night in question, I returned home from the dwelling of a friend in the neighbourhood, and saw deceased at his door, taking leave of two females. He had a light in his hand. One of the women, who seemed by her figure and general appearance

to be young, was at the garden-gate; and I could not see her countenance. The light which the deceased carried fell fully upon the face of the other female; and I therefore obtained a good view of her. The prisoner at the bar is the female alluded to."

Mrs. Dyer then narrated how she and her lodgers had discovered the murder on the ensuing morning; but these details are already known to the reader.

The inspector of police who had the case in hand, was next examined, and his deposition was to the following effect:—"In consequence of the information I received from Mrs. Dyer, immediately after the murder was discovered, I instituted certain inquiries, and ascertained, in the course of the morning, that an old and a young woman had taken a cab in the neighbourhood of the Angel at Islington, on the previous night, which was the one in question. They drove to Suffolk-street, Pall Mall, where the young lady paid the driver his fare from a heavy and well-filled purse. The driver gave me a description of the elder female; and that description tallied with the one already given by Mrs. Dyer. I thereupon repaired to Suffolk-street, and learnt that the two women had taken their departure in a post-chaise, between nine and ten o'clock that morning. This was the morning after the murder. Previous to their departure, they were joined by a young gentleman who went away with them. He had called on several occasions at the lodgings; and his name was—"

Here the magistrate interposed, and said that it might not be necessary to mention this name publicly, as there was nothing to implicate the gentleman referred to.

The inspector accordingly proceeded thus:—"The chaise was sent for in a great hurry, and its destination was unknown to the landlady and servants of the house. No previous intimation of the intended departure of the lodgers had been given. They settled all their liabilities before they left. The prisoner at the bar paid the rent and other little matters owing; but did not display any large sum of money. Having ascertained all these particulars, I sent a description of the elder female to the various railways having electric telegraphs; and the prisoner at the bar was apprehended at Dover, in consequence of the information thus conveyed."

Upon being cross-examined by the learned gentleman for the defence, the inspector fairly and impartially deposed as follows:—"The stake with which the murder was evidently perpetrated, was found by the side of the corpse. It was taken from a piece of unenclosed waste ground at the back of the house. I believe this to be the fact, because I have discovered a hole from which a stake had most likely been taken; and the stake now produced fits that hole. I also discovered marks of footsteps between the back door of the house and the spot where the stake had been pulled up. Those marks are of a man's boots. The soil of some part of the waste ground is moist and damp. There are marks on the window-ledge of the back parlour, as if some one with dirty boots or shoes had clambered up and stood there. The shutters have numerous heart-holes in them, so that a person standing up on the ledge, outside the window, could see into the back parlour. I discovered no traces of any female footsteps on the waste ground; neither are there two descriptions of marks. They

are all produced by the same sized boots. The door-post of the back gate was cut away from the outside. Whoever did it must have known the precise place where the bolt fitted into the door-post in the inside. The cutting away rendered it easy to force back the bolt with the fingers. The work of cutting was performed, I should say, with a knife—most probably a pocket or clasp-knife. It must have taken half an hour at the least to accomplish; and the hand that did it must have been tolerably strong. There are marks of footsteps, indicated in the same manner as those on the window-ledge, up the stairs from the back door to the back parlour. The lock of the back door so often alluded to, was picked from the outside."

The inspector's evidence terminated here; and the counsel for Mrs. Fitzhardinge recalled Mrs. Dyer.

"Will you state, as accurately as you can, the hour when you returned home on the night of the murder?" he asked.

"Half-past eleven, sir," was the answer.

"That will do," said the learned gentleman, who forthwith proceeded to call the driver of the cab which Mrs. Fitzhardinge and Perdita had taken on the night in question. "At what hour," he demanded, "did the prisoner and the young lady who accompanied her hire your vehicle?"

"It was twelve o'clock," replied the man. "I am sure it was precisely midnight, because I had just left a public-house when I was hailed by the ladies."

This witness was ordered to stand down; and the landlady of the house in Suffolk-street was called next. She deposed that she was sitting up for her lodgers on the night in question, and that they reached home at twenty minutes to one. She was certain as to the correctness of her statement, because she looked at the clock in the passage as she passed by to let the ladies in. There was nothing confused in their manner. She attended them to the door of their bed-chamber, and did not observe that their shoes were at all soiled with damp clay. She was convinced that they did not leave the house again that night. The ladies had always appeared to have plenty of money from the very day they entered her dwelling.

The learned counsel then proceeded to address the magistrate on behalf of Mrs. Fitzhardinge. He began by remarking on the meagre nature of the evidence against her—the mere fact that she and the young lady who was with her, and who was her daughter, were the last persons seen in the company of the murdered man;—and he complained bitterly that his client should have been arrested—ignominiously brought back to London—and forced through the ordeal of a public examination on such a shallow pretence. Every circumstance, adduced that morning—every feature of the evidence, tended only to exculpate the prisoner at the bar. In the first place, it was clear, from the testimony record, that the prisoner and her daughter had quitted the house of the deceased at half-past eleven—had taken a cab at the Angel at midnight—and had driven straight home, reaching Suffolk-street at twenty minutes to one. Now the distance from the scene of the murder to the Angel would require rapid walking for two females to accomplish in half an hour, and leave not an instant to accomplish the crime before they set out, much less to cut away the

door-post, ransack the deceased's boxes, and so forth. From the Angel they were traced home, and they did not leave the house again that night. Now, the evidence of the inspector of police tended, to show incontestibly that the murder had been perpetrated by a man. He (the learned counsel) was instructed to state that Mrs. Fitzhardinge and her daughter had called upon Mr. Percival for the purpose of obtaining the discount of a bill; that he did discount the document, and that he left his cash-box open on the table during the negotiation. It was presumable that some man, who probably knew the premises well, had clambered up against the back-window, had beheld the cash-box and its contents, and, during the night, had perpetrated the bloody deed. The speedy departure of the prisoner, her daughter, and the gentleman who had been alluded to, on the morning following that night of the crime, was occasioned by the fact that the young people contemplated a matrimonial alliance unknown to the gentleman's parents; and the means of travelling having been procured by the discount already mentioned, there was no necessity to delay the departure for Paris any longer. This was the simple and plain explanation of the suddenly undertaken journey and the precipitate decampment from Suffolk-street. But the ladies did not act as if they had committed a crime, nor their male companion as if he had been an accomplice in one; for they travelled by post-chaise instead of by rail, to Dover; and there they waited quietly until the steam-packet left next morning, instead of hiring some small craft, as they might have done, to wait them across, the same night of their arrival, to Calais. Again, if the prisoner and her daughter had even entertained such a fearful idea as that of depriving the miser of his life for the sake of his gold, they would have had a better opportunity of carrying it into execution while alone with him in his back parlour, than by the roundabout manner suggested by the nature of the charge against Mrs. Fitzhardinge. During the short time the two ladies had dwelt at the lodgings in Suffolk-street they had not been embarrassed for want of funds; nor even when they sought the aid of the discount was their need so pressing, much less was it of that desperate nature which could alone prompt to such a dreadful alternative as murder. The reason why the assistance of the deceased was sought at all, could be readily explained by the avowal that the bill to be discounted was not a security which any other class of money-lenders would entertain: it was the promissory note of a young gentleman raising cash upon his expectations, and therefore of a character suiting only the purposes of a discount who took an amount of interest proportionate to the risk which he ran. In conclusion, the learned gentleman insisted that there was not a shadow of evidence against his client.

The magistrate acquiesced in this view of the case, and discharged Mrs. Fitzhardinge forthwith. She was, however, compelled to repair from the Marylebone Police-court to the tavern where the coroner was holding an adjourned inquest upon the body; but the result of her examination before the magistrate being communicated to that functionary, she was not detained on his authority. A verdict of "Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown" was returned, and the old woman once more found herself at liberty.

The evidence given by the inspector of police at the Marylebone court, and repeated in the presence of the coroner, had excited certain suspicions in the mind of Mrs. Fitzhardinge; and the more she pondered upon the subject—the more she reflected upon the occurrences at Percival's house on the night of the murder, and the details of the manner in which the deed itself must have been accomplished, the more confident did she become that she could name the assassin.

Had circumstances permitted, she would have remained in London to ferret out the individual whom she thus associated with the crime: but she could not now spare the time; for she was anxious to proceed, without delay, to Paris, and join her daughter and Charles Hatfield, who, she had no doubt, had reached that capital in safety.

Her examination at the police-court, and her attendance at the inquest, had however consumed the entire day; and she therefore waited until the next morning, when she departed by the first train for Folkestone, at which town she arrived in time to embark on board a steamer for Boulogne.

In order that we may accurately show the precise time when Mrs. Fitzhardinge reached Paris, we must request our readers to observe, that on the same day that Charles and Perdita crossed the water to Calais, the old woman was borne back to London by the constables: on the following day, while they were journeying towards the French capital, she was undergoing the examination already recorded;—on the third day, when they were married at the British Ambassador's chapel, she was hastening to join them;—and it was, therefore, in the after-part of the fourth day, being the one on which the separation of Charles and her daughter had occurred, that Mrs. Fitzhardinge entered Paris in the diligence, or stage-coach—thoroughly wearied out by the fatigue, annoyance, and excitement she had lately undergone.

The old woman repaired to an hotel in the immediate neighbourhood of the office where the coach stopped; and, having changed her apparel, drove forthwith in a hackney vehicle to the British Embassy: for it must be remembered that she was entirely ignorant of every thing that had taken place in respect to her daughter and Charles since she had been separated from them, and knew not where they had put up in Paris. Indeed, she even had her misgivings whether they were in the French capital at all, or whether they might not have set out upon some tour immediately after their marriage; for that they were already united in matrimonial bonds, she had no doubt. That they had returned to Dover to look for her, she did not flatter herself; inasmuch as she had latterly seen enough of Perdita's altered disposition to be fully aware that all maternal authority or filial affection were matters which the young lady was more inclined to treat with contempt than with serious consideration. But Mrs. Fitzhardinge was resolved not to be thrust aside without an effort to regain the maternal authority: as for the filial affection, her soul—tanned, hardened, rendered rough and inaccessible, and with all its best feelings irremediably blunted by the incidents of her stormy life—her soul, we say, experienced but a slight pang at the idea of having to renounce that devotedness which it is usually a mother's joy and delight to receive at the hands of a daughter.

No; the aim of this vile intriguing woman was merely the re-establishment of her former ascendancy over her daughter,—by fair means or by foul—by conciliation or intimidation—by ministering to her vanity and her pride, or by working on her fears—by rendering herself necessary to her, or by reducing her to subjection through a course of studied despotism and tyranny. Her imagination pictured the voluptuous and impassioned Perdita clinging to her young husband as to something which had become necessary to her very existence, and from which it were death to part; and she chuckled within herself, as she muttered between her lips,—“The girl would have this marriage; and it shall be made in my hands a means to subdue her! For in her tenderest moments—when reading love in *his* eyes, and looking love with *her own*,—when wrapt in Elysian dreams and visions of ineffable bliss—then will I steal near her, and whisper in her ear, ‘Perdita, you must yield to me in all things; or with a word—a single word—will I betray you to that fond, confiding fool; I will blast all your happiness, and he shall cast thee away from him as a loathsome and polluted thing!’”

With such agreeable musings as these did Mrs. Fitzhardinge while away the half-hour which the hackney-coach occupied in driving her from the hotel to the British Embassy. It was now five o’clock in the evening, and she fortunately found the chaplain’s clerk in an office to which the gate-porter directed her to proceed. From the official to whom she was thus referred, she learnt that Charles Hatfield and Perdita Fitzhardinge were united in matrimonial bonds on the previous day; and an inspection of the register, for which she paid a small fee, enabled her to ascertain the address they had given as their place of abode in the French capital.

Satisfied with these results, Mrs. Fitzhardinge returned to the vehicle, and ordered the coachman to drive her to an hotel which she named, and which was the one mentioned in the register. We should observe that the old woman spoke French with fluency; and thus she had no difficulty in making herself understood in the gay city of Paris.

CHAPTER CLV.

THE MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

On arriving at the hotel indicated, Mrs. Fitzhardinge alighted, and inquired of the porter whether Mr. and Mrs. Hatfield were residing there. The man referred to a long list of names on a paper posted against the wall; and, after running his eye down the column, turned to the old woman with the laconic, but respectfully uttered observation,—“Removed to No. 9, Rue Monthabor.”

To this new address did Mrs. Fitzhardinge repair, without pausing to ask any further question; and, on her arrival at the entrance to a house of handsome appearance in the street named, she inquired for Mr. and Mrs. Hatfield.

“Oh! it is all right,” said the porter. “I was told that if any persons called to ask for Mrs. Hatfield, I was to direct them to the lady who has taken the second floor.”

Mrs. Fitzhardinge was somewhat surprised by this ambiguous answer: but it instantly struck her that Charles might have assumed his title of *Viscount Marston*, and that the name of *Hatfield* would,

therefore, be unknown to the porter, had no particular instructions been left with him. At all events, she was in too great a hurry to remain bandying words with the man; and she accordingly hastened to ascend to the second floor, which, we should observe by the way, is the most fashionable in Parisian houses.

But as she mounted the staircase, it struck her that the porter, when replying to her query, had made no mention of any gentleman at all, but had plainly and clearly spoken of “the lady who has taken the second floor.” The old woman was puzzled—indeed, bewildered by the mystery which suddenly appeared to envelope her; and a certain misgiving seized upon her mind, the nature of which she could not precisely define.

On gaining the marble landing of the second floor, she rang the bell at the door of the suite of apartments on that flat, and was immediately admitted by Rosalie into a handsomely furnished drawing-room.

“Whom shall I mention to mademoiselle?” quired the French lady’s-maid.

“Her mother,” was the response.

Rosalie withdrew; and Mrs. Fitzhardinge, seating herself upon an elegant ottoman, cast her eyes around the splendid room.

“Perdita is well lodged, at all events,” she mused inwardly. “But somehow or another, there is a mystery which I cannot comprehend. The porter spoke of no gentleman—the maid was equally silent on that head, and alluded to her mistress as *mademoiselle** and not as *madame*. What can it mean?”

At this moment the door opened, and Perdita made her appearance in a charming *deshabille*; for she had been assisting to arrange her effects in her newly-hired ready-furnished apartments.

The meeting between the mother and daughter was characterised by nothing cordial—much less affectionate: there was no embracing—not even a shaking of the hand, but only a mutual desire, hastily evinced on either side, to receive explanations.

“Where is Charles?” demanded Mrs. Fitzhardinge.

“Gone,” was the laconic reply.

“Gone!” ejaculated the old woman, now manifesting the most profound astonishment.

“Yes; gone—departed—never to return,” said Perdita, with some degree of bitterness: then, in an altered tone, and with recovered calmness, she asked, “But how have you managed respecting the accusation—?”

“Ah! then you have heard of *that*?” interrupted Mrs. Fitzhardinge, with a subdued feeling of spite; for she thought that her daughter took the matter very quietly. “I was taken back to London—examined at the Marylebone Police-court—and discharged without much difficulty. Now, in your turn, answer my next question—wherefore has Charles left you?”

“In the first place,” said Perdita, “tell me how you discovered my abode?”—and she fixed her large grey eyes in a searching manner upon the old woman, as if to ascertain by that look the precise extent of her mother’s knowledge relative to herself and Charles.

* Equivalent to “Miss” in English.

"That is speedily explained," observed Mrs. Fitzhardinge, who instantly perceived that her daughter intended to reveal to her no more than she was actually compelled to do; and it flashed to her mind—she knew not why—that Perdita meant especially to throw a veil over the fact of her marriage with Charles. Else, why had she not immediately mentioned it?—why had she not hastened to satisfy her that the alliance had indeed taken place? But if Perdita had a motive in concealing that fact, then the knowledge of the secret might sooner or later prove serviceable to Mrs. Fitzhardinge; and she therefore resolved to feign ignorance. All these thoughts and calculations swept through the old woman's brain in a moment; and she preserved the while the most steady composure of countenance. "That is speedily explained," she repeated. "I went to the Prefecture of Police, and learnt your address."

"But you know not by what name to ask for me," said Perdita, still keeping her eyes fixed on her mother's countenance.

"I inquired for you by the name of Fitzhardinge," answered the old woman, hazarding the falsehood; "and was referred to the hotel where you and Charles had put up—"

"And on your calling there?" asked Perdita, impatiently.

"The porter laconically told me that you had removed hither," returned the old woman. "But what means the absence of Charles? and has he not married you?"

"No," responded Perdita, reading in her mother's countenance more intently—more searchingly than hitherto: "he has played a perfidious part, and deserted me."

"The villain!" ejaculated the old woman, affecting to give full credence to the denial that the matrimonial alliance had taken place; while, on the other hand, Perdita was completely deceived by her mother's profound duplicity.

"The adventures I have experienced," said Perdita, "have been numerous and exciting. When every thing was settled for the ceremony to take place, the father of Charles suddenly appeared upon the scene, and exposed me in a cruel manner to his son. In fact, Mr. Hatfield proved himself to be well acquainted with all—every thing—relating to you and me; and he unsparingly availed himself of that knowledge. I retaliated—I convinced him that his family affairs were no secret to me;—and then he again assumed the part of one who triumphs in defeating the hopes of another; for he produced unquestionable evidence to the fact that his son is illegitimate, and entirely dependent upon him."

"Ah!" ejaculated Mrs. Fitzhardinge, who now fancied that she read the reason which had induced Perdita to conceal her marriage with the young man. "Then, after all, your suitor is plain Charles Hatfield, and not Viscount Marston?"

"Such is indeed the case, mother," returned Perdita; "and I think you will agree with me that I have had a fortunate escape."

"I do congratulate you on that point," answered the old woman, her dissimulation continuing impenetrable. "But where have you obtained the means to hire this handsome lodging?"

"You cannot suppose that I allowed Mr. Hatfield and his son to depart without making am-

ple provision for me!" exclaimed Perdita. "No; I displayed a too intimate acquaintance with all their family affairs to permit them thus to abandon me. Besides, the very secret of the young man's illegitimacy—a secret which the father revealed in a moment of excitement, produced by the discussion that took place between us—that secret—"

"I understand you, Perdita," said Mrs. Fitzhardinge; "it was necessary to purchase your silence respecting a matter that involved the good name and the honour of Lady Georgiana Hatfield. Well, have you made a profitable bargain for yourself?"

"A thousand pounds in ready money; and five hundred a-year for life, on condition that I return not to England," was the response.

"Good!" ejaculated the old woman, her eyes glistening with delight.

"And I have adopted another name, for a variety of reasons," continued Perdita. "In the first place, having learnt from that hated Mr. Hatfield of your arrest at Dover, and the nature of the charge against you, I feared lest the whole thing should be blazoned in the newspapers—"

"Well, well," interrupted her mother: "I understand! The name of *Fitzhardinge* would suit no longer. What is the new one?"

"I have taken that of *Mortimer*," answered the daughter. "Laura Mortimer sounds prettily, I think?"

"Then you have not even retained your Christian name?" said the old woman, interrogatively.

"No: for it is so uncommon, that it could not fail to excite attention, wherever whispered," was the reply.

"In this case, I am to become Mrs. Mortimer?" continued the mother.

"Precisely so; and as a matter of course, you will take up your abode with me."

"You do not appear particularly unhappy at the loss of the young man whom you fell so deeply in love with?" observed the old woman, whom we must now denominate Mrs. Mortimer.

"That dream has passed—gone by—vanished!" returned Laura—for by this Christian name is Perdita to be henceforth known; and as she spoke, her voice assumed a deep and even menacing tone. "Yes—that illusion is dissipated; and, if circumstances permit, I will have vengeance where I used to think only of love."

"To what circumstances do you allude?" demanded Mrs. Mortimer.

"Can you not understand my position—aye, and your own position also?" exclaimed Laura. "At present we are dependent, to a certain degree, upon Mr. Hatfield, and must adhere to the conditions he imposed upon me: that is to say, we must reside on the continent so long as the income allowed by him shall be indispensably necessary. But the moment that I can carve out a new career of fortune for myself, either by a brilliant marriage, or by enchainning some wealthy individual in my silken meshes,—the instant that I find myself in a condition to spurn the aid of Mr. Hatfield's purse, and can command treasures from another quarter,—then, mother, then," added Laura, emphatically, "will be the time for vengeance! For, think you," she continued, drawing herself proudly up to her full height, while her nostrils dilated and her eyes

flashed fire,—“think you that, if I have loved as a woman, I will not likewise be avenged as a woman? Oh! yes—yes; and welcome—most welcome will be that day when I shall see myself independent of the purse of Mr. Hatfield, and able to work out my vengeance after the manner of my own heart! To be exposed by the father and discarded by the son—to have the mask torn away from my countenance by the former, and be looked upon with loathing and abhorrence by the latter,—oh, all this is enough to drive me mad—mad! And if I retained a calm demeanour and a stern composure of countenance in the presence of those men this morning, it was only the triumph of an indomitable pride over feelings wounded in the most sensitive point!”

“Vengeance, indeed, is a pleasing consummation,” said the old woman: then, after an instant’s pause, she added, “And I also have a vengeance to gratify.”

“You, mother!” ejaculated Laura, with unfeigned surprise.

“Yes. You remember the night that we called upon Percival? Well, you may recollect how he spoke of a certain visitor who had been with him—”

“Torrens—your husband,” observed Laura, quietly.

“The same. He was the murderer of Percival,” added Mrs. Mortimer, her countenance assuming an expression so fiend-like, that it was horrible to behold.

“How know you that?” demanded Laura, surprised.

“I am convinced of it,” returned her mother. “Listen! On that night when we visited the miser, Torrens had been with him: indeed, he had departed from the house only the moment before we knocked at the door. You remember that Percival said so? Well—and you also recollect that Torrens was represented to be poor and very miserable? While we were engaged with Percival, the cash-box was produced, and its contents were displayed. A man clambered up to the window, and looked through the holes in the shutters. This was proved at the police-office. We departed, and the miser was left alone. The back gate was forced open—or, rather, the wood-work was cut away in such a manner as to allow the bolt to be shot back with the fingers—and the lock was picked with a piece of iron. All this was done from the outside. Then, again, the stake whereby the old man was killed was taken from a piece of waste ground at the back of the house; and on the damp clayey soil the marks of boots were discovered. The murder was therefore perpetrated by the man whose footsteps were thus traced; and who could that man be but Torrens? I have no doubt of the accuracy of my conjectures.”

“They are reasonable, at the least,” observed Laura. “But wherefore do you trouble your head about him, when I require your assistance here in a matter of importance?”

“One moment, and you shall explain your views when I have made you acquainted with mine,” said Mrs. Mortimer. “Percival was a rich man, and that cash-box contained a treasure in notes and gold. Torrens has, no doubt, concealed himself somewhere in London;—a man who has committed such a crime invariably regards the metropolis itself as the safest hiding-place. My design is to ferret him out, and compel him by menaces to surrender into my keep-

ing the treasure which he has obtained. You and I Perdita—Laura, I mean—will know how to spend those thousands; and it will give me pleasure—unfeigned pleasure,” she added, with a fearful expression of countenance, “to know that he has been plunged back again into misery and want.”

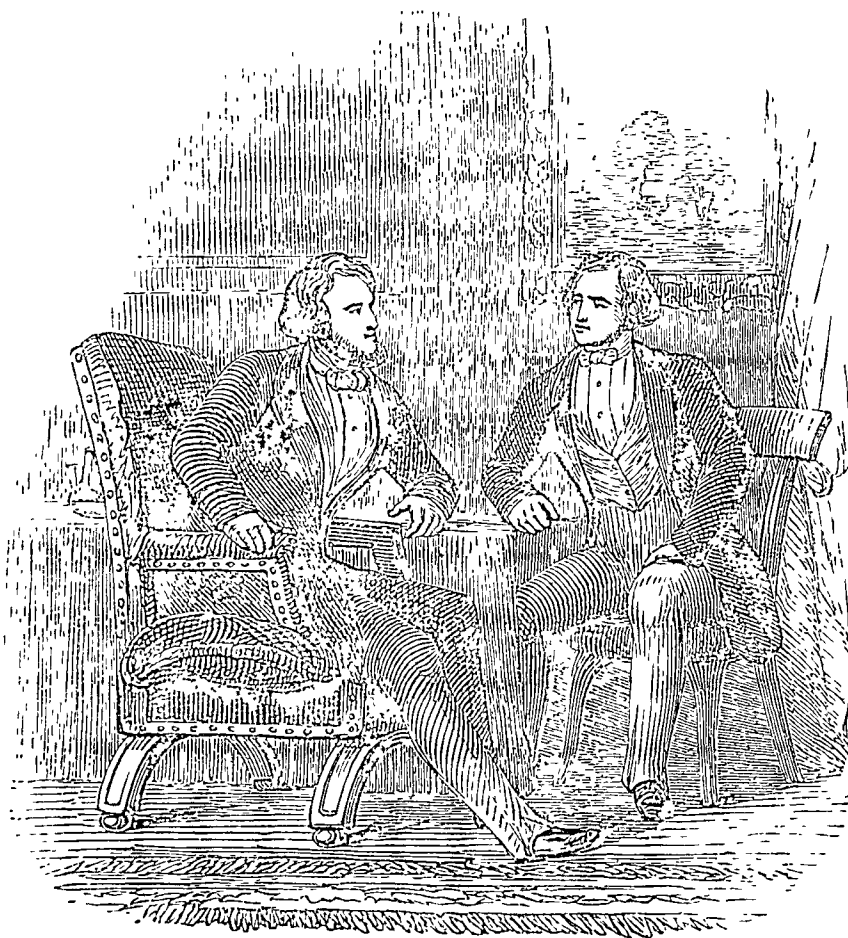
“The project is a good one, mother,” said Laura; “and the money would prove most welcome. Possessed of a few thousands of pounds, I would at once act in complete independence of Mr. Hatfield. But wherefore this bitter vengeance against the man who is still your husband?”

“Because, when he was released from Newgate upwards of nineteen years ago, when imprisoned there on suspicion of having murdered a certain Sir Henry Courtenay,” said the old woman,—“when he was set free, I tell you, I still languished a prisoner in that horrible gaol. And he came not near me: he recognised me not—he loathed and abhorred me; and I knew it! You, Laura, have felt how terrible it is to be hated—shunned—forsaken by one on whom you have claims: *you* are still smarting under the conduct of Charles Hatfield. Can you not, then, comprehend how I should cherish feelings of bitterness against that sneaking coward—that base wretch, who was a partner in my iniquity, and who abandoned me to my fate, doubtless hoping that a halter would end my days, and for ever rid him of me.”

“But you loved not that man, according to all I have ever heard you say upon the subject,” returned Laura; “whereas,” she added, in a tone of transitory softness, “I did—yes—I *did* love Charles Hatfield.”

“Granted the difference!” ejaculated Mrs. Mortimer; “and yet, even making every possible allowance for that, there is still room enough to admit the existence of my bitter hostility against Torrens. What! was I not arrested the other day—dragged ignominiously back to London—compelled to sleep in a prison, and forced to appear at the bar of justice,—and all on account of *his* crime! He reaped the benefit—I the inconvenience, the fear, the exposure, and the disgrace! It is true that I never loved him—never even liked him;—true, also, that ours was a marriage of convenience—both suspecting, despising, and abhorring each other. From the very first, then, I was his enemy; and ever since I have cherished an undying animosity against him.”

“Well, mother, I shall not attempt to interfere with your vengeance any more than you will seek to mar the progress of mine. You have given me an explanation of your views; and it is now my turn to speak. This morning,” continued Laura, “my hopes were suddenly defeated, and my golden dreams dissipated by the appearance of Mr. Hatfield. At half-past eleven o’clock, I found myself deserted by him whom I had loved, and alone as it were in a strange city. I instantly made up my mind not to yield to sorrow or give way to grief; and when a woman, placed in such circumstances, will not permit her tender feelings to get the better of her pride—when, in fact, she takes refuge in that very pride against the poignancy of sorrow—she necessarily conceives thoughts of vengeance. For the pride which becomes her defence and her shield in such a case, must be vindicated. I therefore determined to cherish this hope of vengeance, and gratify that hope when the proper time shall come.



But, in the interval—and first of all—I must create a brilliant social position for myself. On these matters I reflected seriously this morning, so soon as Charles and his father had taken their departure. Then, to a certain extent, I made a confidant of my French lady's-maid, who has already become deeply attached to me, and in whom I speedily discovered a spirit of intrigue and a shrewd disposition. At the same time, I told her nothing more than was absolutely necessary to account for the abrupt departure of Charles and my change of name; and even those explanations which I did give her were not entirely true. In a word, I acted with caution, while I secured her fidelity and devotion to my interests. Having thus come to a certain understanding, as it were, we repaired to an agency-office, kept by an Englishman, and made inquiries for furnished apartments in a fashionable neighbourhood. The agent conducted us hither: I inspected the suite—approved of it—paid a half-year's rent in advance—and removed into my new abode, where you now find me, at about three o'clock this afternoon."

"You have lost no time in settling yourself thus far at all events," observed Mrs. Mortimer.

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"But proceed: you have more yet to explain to me."

"Only to observe that *your* aid is now required, mother, to help me to that brilliant position which I am determined to reach, and the attainment of which will render us independent for the remainder of our days."

"My aid and assistance you shall have, Laura—aye, and effectually too," returned the old woman, with difficulty concealing the joy and triumph which she experienced on finding herself thus again appealed to as a means to work out a grand design: "but a fortnight's delay will not prejudice your scheme. You will not lose one particle of your beauty in that time: on the contrary, you will recover your wonted hues of health—for your cheeks are somewhat pale this evening, and there is a bluish tint around your eyes. Doubtless," she added, with a slightly malicious grin, "Charles Hatfield was a husband to you in every thing save the indissoluble bonds?"

"No," replied Laura, with an effrontery so cool, so complete, that, had the old woman been questioning her daughter on suspicion only, and not on a verified certainty, she would have been

satisfied with that laconic, but emphatic negative.

"Ah! then your maudlin sentimentalism did not render you altogether pliant and docile to the impetuous passions of that handsome young man?" she observed.

"Believing that we were to be married," answered Laura, "I necessarily refrained from compromising myself in his estimation. But wherefore these questions, mother?"—and again the fine large eyes the young woman were fixed searchingly on Mrs. Mortimer's countenance.

"I had no particular motive in putting those queries," was the response, apparently delivered off hand, but in reality well weighed and measured, as was every word that the artful old creature uttered upon this occasion. "I was merely curious to learn whether your prudence or your naturally voluptuous temperament had prevailed in the strong wrestle that must have taken place between those feelings, while you were travelling and dwelling alone with a handsome young man whom you almost adored."

"Not quite alone, mother," exclaimed Laura, impatiently. "Rosalie was with us."

"Oh! the French lady's maid, who is so shrewd in disposition, and who manifests such an admirable capacity for intrigue!" cried the old woman, unable to resist the opportunity of bantering her daughter a little, in revenge for the cool insults which she herself had received at the hands of that daughter during the last few days of their sojourn in England.

"Mother, have you sought me out only to revive a certain bitterness of feeling which you so recently studied to provoke between us?" demanded Laura, her countenance flushing with indignation; and when she had ceased speaking, she bit her underlip with her pearly teeth.

"No, no: we will not dispute," said Mrs. Mortimer. "But you must admit that I warned you not to dream of marriage with that Charles Hatfield; and, had you followed my advice, and stayed in London, you might have retained him as a lover——"

"Let us not talk of the past," interrupted Laura, with an imperiousness of manner which warned her mother not to provoke her farther. "The present is assured, and we are at least independent; but the future is before us—and *there* is the sphere in which my hopes are soaring."

"To return, then, to the point whence I ere now diverged," resumed Mrs. Mortimer, "I will repeat my assertion that one fortnight's delay will not mar your plans. On the contrary, you will obtain physical rest after the fatigues of travelling, and mental composure after the excitement of recent occurrences. Your charms will be enhanced, and you will thereby become the more irresistible. This fortnight's interval I require for my own purposes, as just now explained to you; and, whatever be the result of my search after Torrens, I pledge myself that, if alive and in health, I will return to you in the evening of the fourteenth day from the present date."

"Agreed!" exclaimed Laura. "You purpose, therefore, to retrace your way to London?"

"Such is my intention. A night's rest will be sufficient to recruit my strength," continued Mrs. Mortimer; "and to-morrow morning I shall depart."

"Now let us thoroughly understand each other and in no way act without a previous consultation and agreement," said Laura. "You are about to return to the English metropolis, and it may happen that you will encounter Charles Hatfield. It is my wish that you avoid him—that you do not appear even to notice him; and, for the same reasons which urge me to give you this recommendation, I must request that you attempt no extortion with his father—that you will not seek to render available or profitable the knowledge you possess of the private affairs of that family. Were you to act contrary to my wishes in this respect, you would only mar the projects which I have formed to ensure the eventual gratification of my vengeance."

"I have listened to you with attention," said the old woman, "because I would not irritate you by interruption. The counsel you have given me was, however, quite unnecessary. My sole object in visiting London is connected with Torrens; and were I to behold Charles Hatfield at a distance, I should avoid him rather than throw myself in his way. His father I know not even by sight. Besides, according to the tacit understanding which appeared to establish itself between you and me just now, we are mutually to forbear from interfering in each other's special affairs; and on this basis, good feelings will permanently exist between us. On my return to Paris, fourteen days hence, I shall devote myself to the object which you have in view; and rest assured that, ere long, some wealthy, amorous, and docile nobleman—English or French, no matter which—shall be languishing at your feet."

"Yes—it is for you to find out the individual to be enchained; and it will then be for me to enchain him," cried Laura, her countenance lighting up with the glow of anticipated triumph.

The mother and daughter thus made their arrangements, and settled their plans in an amicable fashion; and the former, after passing the night at the handsome lodgings which Laura occupied, set out in the morning on her journey back to London.

We must here pause, for a brief space, to explain the sentiments and motives that respectively influenced these designing women during the lengthy discourse above recorded.

We have already stated, that even before Mrs. Mortimer found herself in the presence of her daughter, her suspicions and her curiosity were excited by two or three mysterious though trivial incidents that occurred; and she had not been many minutes in Laura's company, before she acquired the certainty that the young woman intended to conceal the fact of her marriage with Charles Hatfield. Mrs. Mortimer at first fancied that this desire arose from shame on the part of Laura, whose pride might naturally revolt from the idea of avowing that, in her eagerness to secure the hand of a nobleman, she had only linked herself indissolubly to a simple commoner, of illegitimate birth, and entirely dependent on his father. But, as the conversation embraced ampler details, and exhibited views more positive and minute, Mrs. Mortimer perceived that Laura was not influenced by wounded pride and shame only in concealing the fact of her marriage; but that, as she contemplated *another* matrimonial alliance, as soon as an opportunity for an eligible match should present itself, she was unwilling to allow her mother to

attain the knowledge of a secret that would place her so completely in that mother's power.

And Mrs. Mortimer had accurately read the thoughts and motives that were uppermost in Laura's mind. For, imagining from the observations made, and the questions put by her mother, that the fact of her marriage with Charles Hatfield was indeed unknown to the old woman, she resolved to cherish so important—so precious a secret. Well aware of the despotic character and arbitrary disposition of her parent, Laura chose to place herself as little as possible at the mercy of one who sought to rule with a rod of iron, and who was unscrupulous and resolute to a degree in adopting any means that might establish her sway over those whom she aspired to controul.

"No—no," thought Laura within herself: "my secret is safe—I am well assured of that;—and my mother shall not penetrate it! The lips of Rosalie, who alone could reveal it to her now, are sealed by rich bribes. For such a secret in my mother's keeping would reduce me to the condition of her slave! I should not dare to contract another marriage; because her exigences would be backed by a menace of exposure, and a prosecution for bigamy; and by means of the terrorism which she would thus exercise over me, I should become a mere puppet in her hands—not daring to assert a will of my own!"

On the other hand, Mrs. Mortimer's thoughts ran thus:—"Laura believes me to be ignorant of her marriage, and my dissimulation shall confirm her in that belief. Yes—I will act so as to lull her into complete security on this point. It would be of no use to me now to proclaim my knowledge of the fact that the marriage *has* taken place; because, at present, she requires my services, and will be civil and courteous to me of her own accord. But when once I shall have helped her to a wealthy and titled husband, and when my aid shall no longer be required, then she will re-assert her sway and attempt to thrust me aside as a mere cypher! But she shall find herself mistaken; and the secret that I thus treasure up must prove the talisman to give me despotic controul over herself, her husband, her household,—aye, and her purse! Yes—yes: she may marry now, without any opposition from me. For, whereas in the former case her marriage would indeed have reduced me to the condition of a miserable dependant, a new alliance will invest me with the power of a despot. Ah! daughter—daughter, you have at length overreached yourself."

And such was indeed the case; for so well did Mrs. Mortimer play her part of deep dissimulation, that Laura felt convinced her secret was safe, and that the circumstance of her marriage was totally unsuspected. And it was as much to confirm the young woman in this belief, as for the purpose of slyly bantering her, that the mother questioned her as to the point to which her connexion with Charles Hatfield had reached, and astutely placed in juxtaposition her daughter's prudence on the one hand, and voluptuousness of temperament on the other. Thus Laura was completely duped, while secretly triumphing in the belief that it was her parent who was deceived!

We must, however, observe, that the two women, under present circumstances, felt dependent on each other in many and important respects; and this

mutual necessity rendered them easy to come to terms and settle their affairs upon an amicable basis.

On the one hand, Mrs. Mortimer relied upon her daughter for pecuniary supplies; and this very circumstance prompted her to undertake the journey to London in the hope of finding Torrens, and extorting from him the treasure of which, as she believed, he had plundered Percival. The possession of a few thousands of pounds, added to her knowledge of Laura's secret, would place her in a condition of complete independence; and that independence she would labour hard to achieve for herself. But she might fail—and then she would again be compelled to fall back on the resources of her daughter. Thus, for the present at least, she *was* in a state of dependence—and it was by no means certain that her visit to London would change her condition in this respect.

On the other hand, Laura was dependent on her mother for aid in carrying out her ambitious views. Ignorant of the French language as she was, she could not hope to succeed by herself alone; and, in intrigues which required so much delicacy of management, she could not rely solely on a lady's-maid. The assistance of her mother was therefore necessary; for she reflected that the astute old woman who had succeeded in inducing Charles Hatfield to accompany her to the lodgings in Suffolk-street, could not fail to lead some wealthy and amorous noble within the influence of her daughter's syren-charms in the Rue Monthabor.

We have now explained the exact position in which these two designing women were placed with regard to each other; and we must request our readers to bear in mind all the observations which we have just recorded, inasmuch as they afford a clue to the motives of many transactions to be hereafter narrated.

For the history of Laura is, as it were, only just commenced; and the most startling, exciting, and surprising incidents of her career have yet to be told.

She was a woman of whom it may be well said, "We ne'er shall look upon her like again!"

But the delineation of such a character as this Perdita—or Laura, as we are henceforth to call her—has the advantage of throwing into glorious contrast the virtues, amenities, and endearing qualities of woman generally,—inasmuch as she is a grand and almost unique exception, proving the rule which asserts the excellent qualities of her sex.

CHAPTER CLVI.

THE HALF-BROTHERS.

It was about five o'clock in the evening of the second day after the incidents just related, that the Earl of Ellingham received a note, the address of which was written in a feigned hand, and with the word "private" marked in the corner.

The messenger, who left it at the mansion in Foul-mall, had departed immediately his errand was discharged, and without waiting for any reply.

Lord Ellingham happened to be alone in the library when the missive was placed in his hands, and on opening it he recognised the writing of his half-brother; for the address only was disguised—a precaution adopted in case the letter should be

observed by the ladies before it reached the hands of the earl.

The contents conveyed a brief intimation that Mr. Hatfield had returned to London with his son, and that they had put up temporarily at the Trafalgar Hotel, Spring-gardens, where the presence of the nobleman was anxiously expected.

Thither the earl accordingly repaired, and a waiter conducted him to an apartment, in which he was received by his half-brother alone—the father having deemed it prudent that the son should not be present while the necessary explanations were being given.

The meeting between the nobleman and Mr. Hatfield was cordial, and even affectionate: how different from that of the mother and daughter in Paris, as described in the preceding chapter!

"You have recovered your son, Thomas," said the earl; "and under any circumstances I congratulate you. The fact that he has returned to London with you convinces me that the paternal authority is once more recognised."

"Yes—he is here—in an adjacent room, Arthur," replied Mr. Hatfield. "I thought it prudent, for many reasons, to send for you privately, and consult you before I ventured to take him back to his mother's presence. Indeed I know not, after all that has occurred, whether you will permit him to cross your threshold again—whether you can ever forgive him."

"He is your son, Thomas, and that is sufficient," interrupted the generous, noble-hearted earl. "Whatever he may have done, I promise to pardon him: however gravely he may have erred, I will yield him my forgiveness. Nay, more—I will undertake to promise the same for my wife, who you know is not a woman that harbours rancour."

"The amiable, the excellent Esther! Oh! no, no—she would not refuse pardon or sympathy to a living soul!" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield. "And you, my generous brother—my never-failing friend—how can I sufficiently thank you for these assurances which you give me, and which so materially tend to lighten the sorrow that weighs upon my heart? I have suffered and undergone much during the few days of my absence from London."

"But you have recovered your son," hastily interrupted the earl, pressing his half-brother's hand with a fervour that was indeed consolatory; "and I am sure that, although his errors may have been great, he has not committed any thing dishonourable. He may have been self-willed—rebellious against the paternal authority—ungrateful—unmindful of those who wish him well; he may have yielded himself up to the wiles of an infamous woman—"

"All that has he assuredly done, Arthur," said Mr. Hatfield, in a melancholy tone; "and more still! For, as you yourself suspected on that day when we made so many distressing discoveries in the library, he found out who I was—who I am,—he believed himself to be my legitimate son—he even raised money by the name of *Viscount Marston*—he dared to contemplate measures to force me to assume your title, and claim your estates; and he would have sacrificed you—me—his mother—the countess—aye, and the amiable, excellent Frances—he would have sacrificed us all," added Mr. Hatfield, profoundly excited, "to his inordinate ambition! Now, my dear Arthur," he asked, in a

milder and more measured tone—"now, can you forgive my son all this?"

"Yes—and more—ten thousand times more!" ejaculated the earl, emphatically. "Had he possessed the right to accomplish all he devised—aye, had he carried out his designs to the very end—even then, Thomas, would I have forgiven him for your sake."

"It is a god—an angel who speaks thus; and not a mere human being!" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, embracing his half-brother with an enthusiasm and a fervour amounting almost to a worship. "Oh! why are not all men like you?—the world would then know not animosity, nor rancour, nor strife; and earth would be heaven!"

"Thomas, Thomas," cried the earl, reproachfully, "attach not too much importance to a feeling on my part which you yourself would show under similar circumstances! But let us speak of your son. He has erred, and you have forgiven him—you, his father, who are the most deeply wounded by his temporary ingratitude, have pardoned him and taken him again to your heart. Shall not I, then, who look upon him in the light of a nephew—shall not I, an uncle, forgive and forget what a father can pardon and obliterate from his memory? Yes—and I will even find extenuating circumstances in his favour: I will search out and conjure up excuses for him! Endowed with an enthusiastic disposition—an ardent longing to render himself conspicuous in the world—a fervid craving to earn distinction and acquire a proud name,—he paused not to reflect whether it were well to shine with an adventitious lustre, or to win for himself and by himself the glory that should encircle his brow. The splendid career of the Prince of Montoni dazzled—nay, almost blinded him; and while he contemplated the eminence on which that illustrious personage stands, he forgot that his Royal Highness obtained not rank and power by hereditary right, but by his great deeds, his steady perseverance in the course of rectitude, and his ennobling virtues. While filled with lofty aspirations, your son suddenly made the discovery of certain family secrets which appeared to place a title within his reach. Ah! pardon him if he stretched out his hand to grasp the visionary coronet,—pardon him, I say—and wonder not if in the eagerness of his desire to clutch the dreamy bauble, he thrust parents, relatives, and friends rudely aside."

"The generosity which prompts you to extenuate his grievous faults shall not be cooled nor marred by any opposite opinion on my part," said Mr. Hatfield. "And, my God! is he not my son?—and have I not already—yes, already—while we were still in Paris—promised to forgive him every thing. But when I think of all the misery his insane ambition would have brought upon you and yours—"

"Oh! the loss of title and wealth would not interfere with my happiness, Thomas," interrupted the earl, smiling.

"And that loss you cannot now sustain—no—never, never!" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, impetuously; "and I thank God that I am enabled to give you this assurance! For the papers—the fatal papers—the family documents, are all burnt—burnt with my own hand, and in the presence of that young man who dared to take them from the secret recess where you had deposited them."

"Ere now you called me generous, Thomas," said the earl,—and for the performance of a com-

mon Christian duty—I mean, the forgiveness of one who has offended and who is penitent. But you, my brother—what generosity have you not shown towards me,—yes—and for years—long years;—and now, to crown it all, you have destroyed these evidences which would make you great at any moment. Oh! as the world's ambition goes, and as human hearts are constituted, *your* generosity outvalues *mine* as immeasurably as the boundless Pacific exceeds the stagnant puddle in the street!"

And, as the earl spoke these words with an enthusiasm and a sincerity that came from the inmost recesses of his heart, he dashed away a tear.

Then, as if suddenly animated by the same sentiment—a sentiment of mutual regard, devotion, and admiration,—the half-brothers grasped each other's hands; and the pressure was long and fervid—a profound silence reigning between them the while,—for, men of years and worldly experience though they were, their souls' emotions were deeply stirred and their finest feelings were aroused.

"I have not yet told you all—perhaps scarcely even the worst, relative to my unfortunate son," said Mr. Hatfield, after a long pause. "That vile woman of whom Villiers spoke—that Perdita Slingsby—or Torrens—or Fitzhardinge—whichever her name may be—"

"Ah! I understand you already," interrupted the earl, in a tone of deep commiseration: "the artful creature has inveigled your son into a hasty marriage. Is it not so?"

"Alas! it is too true, Arthur," said Mr. Hatfield; and he then proceeded to narrate to his brother all that had occurred during his absence from London,—the accident near Greenwich—the adventure with the officers at Dover—the interview with his son in Paris—the negotiations with Perdita—and the terms which he had finally settled with that designing woman.

"Oh! that you had been one day earlier," exclaimed Lord Ellingham; "and this odious marriage would not have occurred. It is lamentable indeed, Thomas—and the more so, in consequence of the hopes that I had founded on the attachment which until lately existed between Charles and my daughter."

"Ah! it is that—it is *that* which cuts me to the very soul!" cried Mr. Hatfield, with exceeding bitterness of tone and manner.

"And yet there is hope—there is hope for us yet!" exclaimed the earl, who, after pacing the room in deep thought for a few minutes, turned suddenly towards his half-brother.

"Hope do you say?" demanded the latter, his countenance brightening up—though he could not as yet conjecture, much less perceive the source whence the gleam of hope could possibly emanate.

"Yes—hope," repeated the earl emphatically, but sinking his voice almost to a whisper, as if he were afraid that the very walls should hear the words he was uttering. "Did not that woman tell you she should contract *another* marriage—"

"She assuredly intimated as much," answered Mr. Hatfield; "and by her words and manner I have no doubt that the intention was uppermost in her mind."

"And from the knowledge which we now possess of her character," added the earl, "we may rest satisfied that she will not refuse the first good offer that presents itself. Well, then—on the day

that she contracts another marriage, Charles may consider himself absolved from the alliance which he so unhappily formed."

"Ah! I comprehend you, my dear Arthur!" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, his heart already feeling lighter. "But the legal tie will still exist," he added an instant afterwards, his voice again becoming solemn and mournful.

"The law is an unnatural—a vile—and a miserable one, which would for ever exclude either that woman or your son from the portals of the matrimonial temple!" said the earl, speaking with impassioned emphasis, though still in a subdued tone. "Charles has discarded her—and she has consented never more to molest him. Already, then, are they severed in a moral point of view. But should that woman contract another marriage—take unto herself another husband—and thereby prove that her severance from the young man whom she ensnared and inveigled, is complete,—should she adopt the initiative in that respect, it would be a despicable fastidiousness and a contemptible affectation on the part of any one to say to Charles Hatfield, '*You must never know matrimonial happiness: but you must remain in your present false position, a husband without a wife, for the remainder of your days*.' It were inhuman—base—and unnatural thus to address your son, when once the woman herself shall have ratified by her actions that compact which her words and her signature have already sanctioned. Were a father to consult me under such circumstances, and ask my advice whether he should bestow his daughter on a young man situated as your son will then be,—my counsel would be entirely in the affirmative. Can you therefore suppose for a moment that I shall shrink from acting in accordance with the advice I should assuredly give to another man who is likewise a father? No—no! If then, in the course of time, this Perdita shall contract a new marriage,—and if your son manifest, as I hope and believe he will do, contrition for the past—if his conduct be such as to afford sure guarantees for the future—and if his attachment for Frances should revive, as I am certain that hers, poor girl! will continue unimpaired,—under all these circumstances, Thomas, I should not consider myself justified in stamping the unhappiness of that pair by refusing my consent to their union."

"Most solemnly do I assure you, Arthur," exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, "that, as an impartial person, and supposing I were disinterested in the matter, I should view it precisely in the same light: but I should not have dared to express those sentiments before you, had you not been the first to give utterance to them."

"It is, after all, the mere common-sense aspect of the question," said the earl. "A young man is inveigled into a marriage with a woman whom he looks upon as an angel of purity; and in a few hours he discovers her to be a demon of pollution. They separate upon positive and written conditions. The tribunals would take cognizance of the affair, and grant a legal divorce were they appealed to: but a private arrangement is deemed preferable to a public scandal. Well, the woman marries again—and every remaining shadow of claim which she might still have had upon the individual whom she had entrapped and deluded, ceases at once. The complete snapping of the bond—the total severance of the tie, is her own doing. It is true that the law may proclaim the first marriage to be the only

legal one: but morality revolts against such an unnatural averment. These are my solemn convictions;—and, were I to ponder upon them for a hundred years, I should not waver one tittle in my belief."

"There is more injustice committed by a false morality—more unhappiness inflicted by a ridiculous fastidiousness, than the world generally would believe," observed Mr. Hatfield.

"Yes—and there is another consideration which weighs with me, Thomas!" exclaimed the earl, turning once more, and now with a smiling countenance, towards his half-brother. "You have shown so much generosity towards me—you have annihilated documents which ninety-nine men out of a hundred would have prized and availed themselves of—and you have exhibited so much noble feeling in all your actions respecting myself and our family honour, that I consider myself bound to effect the union of my daughter and your son, if it be practicable. This, then, I propose—that the unfortunate marriage of Charles shall be kept a profound secret, and that he shall leave England for a short time, so that active employment may completely and radically wean his mind from any lingering attachment that he may entertain for the polluted Perdita. With regard to this latter suggestion I have a project which I will presently explain to you. Respecting the maintenance of the secret of his unhappy marriage, I should recommend its propriety even were there no ulterior considerations of the nature already stated. For of what avail can it be to distress my wife or yours—much less my daughter—by a revelation of the sad circumstance? In any case, Frances would not be permitted to learn that secret; and I should be loth indeed to afflict Lady Ellingham by the narration of such a history."

"And you may be well assured, Arthur," observed Mr. Hatfield, "that it would prove no pleasant task for me to inform Lady Georgiana that her son, by his mad ambition and his fatal misconceptions, had compelled me to make known to him the fact of his illegitimacy. Neither should I wish to distress her by unfolding to her the secret of this most miserable marriage."

"It is fortunate that we were so guarded with our wives on that morning when we made such alarming discoveries in the library," observed Lord Ellingham: "it is a subject for self-congratulation that we merely intimated the fact of Charles's departure that day with an abandoned woman —"

"Yes—and it was to your prudent representations that I yielded, when I was about to commit the folly of imparting every thing to my wife,—the loss of the papers—the certainty that Charles had not only taken them, but had likewise discovered every thing relating to my own past life —"

"It was scarcely my advice, Thomas, which prevented you from making all those revelations to Georgiana," said the earl: "but it was when —"

"Yes—I remember: it was when we resolved to depart in search of the fugitive, that I found my wife was so overcome by the first word I uttered—the word which told her he was gone—that I could not feel it in my heart to afflict her by farther revelations."

"You scarcely require to be informed that Villiers and myself each pursued the road that we respectively took, until we acquired the certainty that no travellers of the description given had passed

that way; but it was late at night when I returned to London, and Villiers was an hour or two later still. While we are, however, conversing in this desultory manner," said the earl, "we forget that Charles is waiting for us in another room."

"And you forget, my dear Arthur," observed Mr. Hatfield, "that you have a project respecting him, but which you have not as yet revealed to me."

"True!" ejaculated Lord Ellingham; "and the explanation can be speedily given. Yesterday afternoon I received a hastily written note from the Prince of Montoni, stating the melancholy intelligence that his illustrious father-in-law, Alberto I., expired after a short illness twelve days ago. The Prince received the news yesterday morning by special courier —"

"And he is now Grand Duke of Castalcicala?" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield.

"Yes—he is a sovereign prince," returned the nobleman,—"and one who will not only make his people happy, but who, I venture to predict, will be the means of regenerating Italy. His Sovereign Highness departs to-morrow for Castalcicala; and, although it be scarcely consistent with propriety to accost him with a request under such circumstances, yet I will do so—trusting that the explanations which I shall give, may excuse the apparent importunity at the present moment."

"And that request?" said Mr. Hatfield, interrogatively.

"Is that the Grand Duke—for by this proud title must we now denominate him—will permit Charles to accompany him in the capacity of one of his *aides-de-camp*. Your son can speak the Italian language as fluently as his own; and his long residence in Castalcicala will have fitted him for the situation I propose to procure for him. Moreover, that aspiring nature—that ardent ambition which has already manifested itself, will be gratified and will find congenial associations and emulative stimulants in the career thus opened to him. If his ambition, in its first strugglings, have unfortunately led him into error, it was on account of the misconceptions to which he yielded, and the baleful influence which a designing woman exercised over him: but, with such a glorious example before him as the illustrious personage into whose service I propose that he shall enter, and keeping in view such legitimate aims as that service naturally suggests, I am much deceived indeed if your son do not prove himself a good, an estimable, and, perhaps, a great man."

"Your advice is as excellent as your purpose is generous and kind," exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, overjoyed at the prospects thus held out.

"We may now release Charles," said the earl, "from the suspense which he is doubtless enduring."

Mr. Hatfield left the room, and shortly afterwards returned, accompanied by the young man, whose face was pale and whose looks were downcast, as he advanced towards the earl.

"My dear Charles," said the good nobleman, embracing him,— "not a word relative to the past! All is forgiven—all forgotten, as far as the memory can forget."

Charles shed tears, while his heart was agitated with many conflicting emotions,—gratitude for the assurance thus given to him—joy that he was so completely pardoned—bitter regret that he should

have ever contemplated aught prejudicial to the interests of the generous earl—revelation on account of the facility with which he had been led astray—and shame at the deplorable errors he had committed.

But when he heard the kind, affectionate, and re-assuring language addressed to him alike by his father and Lord Ellingham,—when he learnt that the main particulars of his late proceedings were to be kept a solemn secret in respect to his mother, the countess, and Lady Frances,—and when he was made acquainted with the project which the earl had suggested relative to placing him about the person of the idol of his heroic worship—the new Grand Duke of Castelcicala,—a genial tide of consolation was poured into his soul; and he felt that the future might yet teem with bright hopes for him!

But not a word was breathed either by Mr. Hatfield or Lord Ellingham respecting *that other prospect* which had evoked so much enlightened reasoning and such liberal sentiments from the lips of the earl: we mean the probability of a marriage eventually taking place between the young man and the beautiful Lady Frances Ellingham.

With the proposal that he should enter the service of the Grand Duke, Charles was delighted; and the earl promised to visit his Sovereign Highness early in the morning, at Markham Place, to proffer the request which he had to make as the necessary preliminary.

The nobleman, Mr. Hatfield, and Charles now repaired to the mansion in Pall Mall, where the presence of the two latter, especially of the last-mentioned, caused feelings of joy which we must leave the reader to imagine.

CHAPTER CLVII.

POLITICAL OBSERVATIONS.—THE DEPARTURE OF CHARLES HATFIELD.

YES—it was true that the Prince of Montoni had become Grand Duke of Castelcicala; and those who have read the First Series of "THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON," have now traced the career of Richard Markham from the period of his obscure boyhood until the time when his brow is circled by a sovereign crown!

And when we reflect that it was a REVOLUTION which evoked his brilliant qualities as a warrior and a statesman,—when we call to mind the fact that it was the cry of "LIBERTY" which became the watch-word of his achievements and the herald of his triumphs,—we cannot do otherwise, on reaching this point in our narrative, than avail ourselves of so fitting an opportunity to notice the grand and glorious struggle that has so lately taken place in the capital of France.

Oh! the French are a fine people, and are destined to teach the world some signal lessons in the school of POLITICAL FREEDOM!

PEOPLE OF ENGLAND! accord your sympathies—your best and most generous sympathies—to that gallant Parisian population which has so recently dethroned a miscreant Monarch, and hurled an execrable Ministry from the seat of power!

Let the English Sons of Toil—oppressed, ground down by taxation, half-starved, and deprived of their electoral rights as they are,—let the Industrious Classes of the British Islands, trampled upon

and made tools of by the wealthy *few* as we know them to be,—let *them* do honour, at least by words to the working men of France who have dared to expel a demon-hearted tyrant and his bravo-hirelings.

The States of Italy—Bavaria—and France have all, within the last few weeks, manifested their scorn and contempt for the doctrine of "the divine right of kings;"—the PEOPLE in those realms have exercised the power which they possess:—the cause has been righteous—the despots have yielded—and one has been overthrown altogether.

For the cause is always righteous when the People seek to wrest from their rulers that freedom which has been basely usurped, and which the tyrannical oligarchy refuses to surrender by fair means to the millions.

It is a monstrous absurdity and a hideous mockery to prate of treason, and sedition, and rebellion, when a people rises up in its might and its power to demand the privileges which are naturally its own.

The *few* cannot possibly possess an inherent or hereditary right to enslave the *many*: nor is the present generation to be bound by the enactments of the preceding one. If that preceding one chose to have a Monarchy, the present one is justified in declaring its will that a Republic shall exist;—and so long as the great majority of the inhabitants of a country are of accord in this respect, they have a right to upset the existing government at any moment and establish another. Nay, more; we will assert that the people need not even be wise or prudent in order to legitimatise their actions:—the great majority may act as they think fit, although they should be unwise or imprudent in respect to the institutions they choose to build up!

We are averse to the exercise of physical force;—but France has shown that when moral agitation fails, violence *must* be used;—and if freedom can be gained by the loss of a few drops of blood—why, then those drops should be shed cheerfully.

Suppose that in any country the great majority of the people sign a document addressed to the sovereign in these terms:—"We are very much obliged to you for having reigned over us hitherto; but we do not require your services farther. It pleases us to establish another form of government and raise up another ruler; and therefore we request you to descend from the throne and surrender up the power delegated to you." Were the sovereign to refuse compliance with this demand, then force should be used; and all the antiquated farces of "hereditary rights," and "treason," and "sedition," and such-like nonsense, would of course be disregarded by an insurgent people.

On the other hand, so long as a nation remains tranquil, and addresses to the sovereign no demand of the kind supposed above, that sovereign may continue to occupy the throne, as the people's executive magistrate; for it is the fault of the millions themselves if they be foolish enough to tolerate either a king or a queen.

Republicanism is the "order of the day;" and there is not a throne in Europe that is worth twenty years' purchase,—no—not even that of the Austrian Kaiser or the Muscovite Czar;—and from the banks of the Thames to the confines of Asia—from the cheerless regions of the North to the sunny shores of the tideless Mediterranean, the prevailing sentiment is adverse to the antiquated, useless, oppressive institutions of Monarchy.

HONOUR TO THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS FRENCH NATION! And let the Royalty which still exists in England beware how it caress, and pet, and openly sympathise with the ex-Royalty which has taken refuge on this soil. For the Queen of England to adopt such a course, were to offer a gross and flagrant insult to the people of France, and inevitably provoke a war. Besides—is not Louis-Philippe a miscreant deserving universal execration? Did he not calmly and deliberately calculate upon butchering the brave Parisian people, in order to consolidate the power of his despot-throne? Are not his hands imbrued with blood? No sympathy, then—no pity for this royal Greenacre—this horrible assassin!

And where he to be received at the palace of our Queen, the insult would not only be monstrous towards the French people, who have expelled him, but equally great towards the English people, who abhor tyrants, and who are generous, humane, and merciful.

WORKING MEN OF ENGLAND! rejoice and be glad—for amidst the changes which have so recently taken place in France, there is one "sign of the times" that is cheering and full of prophetic significance for you! I allude to the grand—the glorious fact, that in the list of the Provisional Government which the Revolution raised up, these words appeared—"ALBERT, Working Man."

Yes: a Working Man was included in that fine category of Republican names; and he has been instrumental in giving to the whole political world that impulse which must inevitably conduct *even the present generation* to the most glorious destinies.

Honour to Albert, the Working Man!

There is another point on which I must touch, ere I resume the thread of my narrative.

The Prime Minister of England has declared "that he has no intention whatever to interfere with the form of government which the French nation may choose for themselves." He therefore admits the right of the nation to establish any form of government which it chooses;—and this concession is an important one, when coming from the principal adviser of the Queen, and from a man who is, after all, nothing more nor less than the chief of an aristocratic clique.

Well, then—it being admitted by the Prime Minister that a nation has a right to choose its own form of government, the sooner the people of England begin to think of establishing new institutions for themselves, the better. For there is no use in disguising the fact—and no possibility of exaggerating it,—that England is in a truly awful condition. Already are we enduring a war-tax; and it was only through fear of seeing the glorious example of the Parisians immediately followed by the inhabitants of London, that the Ministers abandoned their iniquitous and execrable scheme of doubling that shameful impost. But the financial ignorance and the wanton extravagance of the Whigs have plunged the country into serious pecuniary embarrassments, from which nothing but the sweeping reform of a purely democratic Ministry can relieve it. With a tremendous national debt,—with no possibility of levying another tax,—with Ireland to care for and almost support,—with a vast amount of absolute penury and positive destitution in the country,—with an aristocracy clinging to old abuses, and with the land in the possession of a contemptibly small oligarchy,—with the indus-

trious classes starving on pitiable wages,—with a pension-list which is a curse and a shame,—with a cumbrous and costly Monarchy,—with a Church grasping at all it can possibly lay hands on,—with a Bench of Bishops in inveterate and banded hostility to all enlightening opinions and popular interests,—and with a franchise so limited that nine-tenths of the people are altogether unrepresented,—with all these, and a thousand other evils which might be readily enumerated, we repeat our assertion that England is in an awful state; and we must add that great, important, and radical changes must be speedily effected.*

Oh! how well and how truly has a great French writer declared that "men have only to will it, in order to be free!" France has set England and the world a great and glorious example in this respect.

These English newspapers which are interested in pandering to the prejudices and the selfishness of a bloated aristocracy and an oppressive oligarchy

* The industrious classes in Great Britain should take into their serious consideration the ensuing plan, which the operatives in France have submitted to the Provisional Government. The basis of a similar scheme might be established in London; and there are doubtless many persons, possessing the intelligence required for the initiative of the grand work who would devote a few hours per week, without fee or reward, to the foundation of so glorious an institution. The plan alluded to is conceived as follows; but we have substituted the equivalent sums of English money for the French coins specified in the original document:—

"Petition for a bill to establish a National Pension Fund for every workman that has attained the age of fifty-five years.

"Every citizen of the two sexes from seventeen to fifty-five years of age shall be bound to pay each day one farthing, or 7½d. per month, or 7s. 6d. per annum; every town or village shall be bound to pay for the totality of its inhabitants.

"Every workman employing workmen or servants is bound to keep back this amount from their wages, and is to be considered responsible therefore.

"Every father of a family who is unfortunate, and has several mouths to support, shall be *exempted* from paying his annual quota until such time as his family shall be able to work.

"Are excluded from the advantages of the pension-fund all persons having a revenue above 32l. a year; the most severe laws to be made against such persons as should rob the money of the poor.

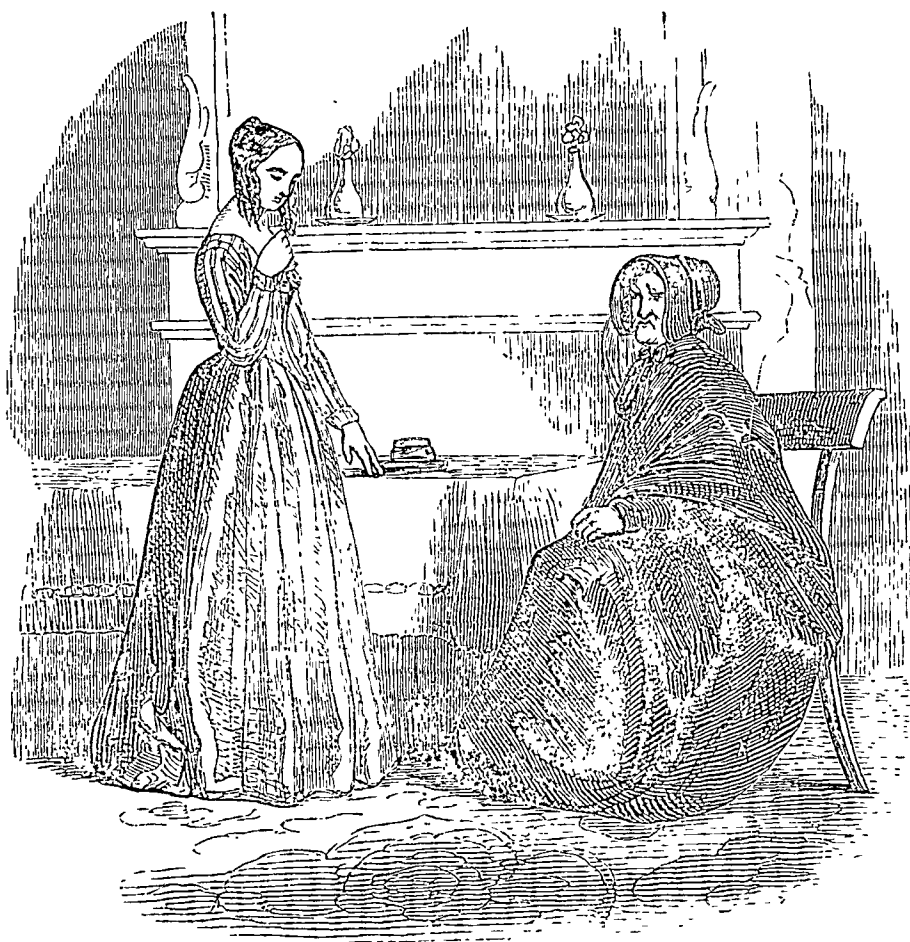
"A scale of pension is to be fixed, giving 20l. a year at 55 years, 25l. at 65 years, and 40l. at 75 years.

"The pension-fund is to be for all citizens: thus bankers, notaries, advocates, in a word, all persons who may have been favoured by fortune all their life-time, will have as much right to it, if they become unfortunate, as the workman who all his life-time has known only labour and privation.

"What workman is there who cannot save 1½d. per week? Who is there that would not blush to receive alms when age shall have weakened his strength and courage?

"The pension which he will receive will be the economy of his whole life; and if he throws a glance backwards, it will be to bless the progress of civilisation.

"The day on which this law will pass, the payment of the pension may commence; since from the age of 17 to 55 all citizens will contribute to the common stock; and since the funds, in place of being capitalised, will be distributed every year. During 15 years the State will have little to add in order to complete the pensions, but after that period it will every year have some sacrifice to make. Let, during the fifteen years, the money hitherto spent on royalty be capitalised. Let the resources of the Civil List be added to them, and the sum will be more than sufficient. If fears are entertained not to obtain a sum sufficient to pay all the pensions, let the diamonds of the crown be sold. The most glorious crown of a government ought to be the happiness of the people."



of andowners, represent revolutions as scenes of spoliation, social ruin, and other demoralisation. But the incidents of the Revolution which gave Louis Philippe a throne in 1830, and those of the grand struggle which has just hurled him from his despot-seat, give the lie—the bold, unequivocal lie—to such statements.*

* Witness the noble conduct of the Parisian operatives, as described in the following extract from the *Constitutionnel* newspaper:—

We have already stated that by the care of the Minister of the Interior prompt measures had been taken to ensure the preservation of the furniture and other articles of value at the Tuilleries. The following are some further details:—The citizen Chalou d'Argé, one of the special commissaries appointed by the minister, after having concerted with Captain St. Amand, commandant of the Tuilleries, proceeded to an inventory of the jewels, objects of art, &c., found there. These gentlemen soon ascertained that the people had respected the various articles scattered about. The apartment of the Duke de Nemours had alone been thrown into disorder, but nothing was taken away. The apartments of the other members of the royal family remained intact. Not a picture was touched in the saloons of the late Duke of Orleans, containing, as they did, a celebrated collection. The most valuable pictures were taken to the Louvre; under the

The time has come when all true Reformers must band together for the public weal. Let there be union,—union of all sects and parties who are in favour of *progress*, no matter what their denomination may be,—whether Republicans, Radicals, Chartist, or Democrats. "Union is strength," says the proverb; and the truth thereof may be fully justified

direction of M. Mérinée. A great quantity of coined money was found in the different apartments; a man of the people conceived the idea of throwing all this money into a baignoire, over which he placed a coverlet, so as to give it the appearance of a couch. He then placed himself on it, and waited in that position until some persons came up who could save the treasure which he had collected. To give an idea of the wealth thus preserved, we may state that on Saturday alone four fourgons, and on Sunday two others, transported to the Treasury masses of silver plate, as well as coffers containing the diamonds of the ex-princesses. In these fourgons there was property to the amount of several millions. The same people which had contributed to save these valuable articles helped to pack them up, and escorted them to the national Treasury. It was a touching sight to behold these hard hands taking up with the greatest precautions diamonds, necklaces, jewels of all kinds. It is useless to say that not an article in the inventory was missing. When M. Bastide and M. Bixio, who had been entrusted by the

and borne out in the present age, and in the grand work of moral agitation for the People's Rights.*

We now proceed with the thread of our narrative; but it is not necessary to give at any length the particulars of the interview which took place between Lord Ellingham and Richard Markham, now Grand Duke of Castelcicala. Suffice it to say, that his Sovereign Highness, though deeply afflicted by the news of his father-in-law's demise, welcomed the English nobleman with the utmost cordiality, and immediately consented to receive Charles Hatfield as one of his *aides-de-camp*. The Earl hastened back to Pall-mall, and, sending for the young man to his private apartment, reasoned with him in an impressive way upon the necessity of retrieving the past by the conduct which he should pursue in future. Charles listened with profound attention to all that the excellent peer said upon this occasion, and promised that his behaviour should henceforth render him worthy of all the signal favours bestowed upon him.

Provisional Government to take charge of the jewels and other valuable property left behind in the Tuilleries, and which had been collected and packed up by men of the people, and an inventory taken of them under the superintendence of a student of the Polytechnic School, and a National Guard, the Government commissioners found the chests, trunks, and other packages in which they had been placed, under the charge of some of the people who had been employed in collecting them. When the whole were removed, one of the men went up to M. Bastide, and said, '*Sir, we have been forgotten since yesterday. It is now twelve o'clock, and we have not yet anything to eat. Can you order us some bread?*' All present were deeply affected by this proof of disinterested fidelity in men, resisting the temptation of property at their command greater in value than any they had ever before seen, and demanding a piece of bread as their only reward. M. Bastide repeatedly urged the man who spoke to him to give his name, but he constantly refused, saying—'*We want nothing more. We can earn our food by our labour. To-morrow we shall return to work, and to-day ask only for the bread we have been unable to obtain.*' They were then fed, and took their departure with the same resolution."

* At the "monster meeting" in Trafalgar-square, on Monday, March 6th, we were called upon to preside in the absence of Mr. Cochrane. The *London Telegraph* contained the ensuing sketch or outline of the speech which we delivered on that occasion, and which we now transfer to the pages of "THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON" simply for the purpose of convincing our readers that we are not afraid to proclaim in all possible ways the opinions which we have for years promulgated through the medium of our writings:—

"Mr. Reynolds rose, and, suggesting that the parties present should form a meeting to congratulate the Parisians on their recent triumph, addressed the meeting. He had been voted to preside at this assembly, in the absence of Mr. Cochrane. Where that gentleman was, he could not say. His conduct was, at least, extraordinary, in convening a meeting which he neglected to attend. He (Mr. Reynolds) must beg of the meeting to be orderly; it was moral force which would gain their ends for them. Let them, therefore, shew that, though met to demand their rights, they knew how to conduct themselves. The French revolution was a glorious triumph of public feeling. The French had recognised the rights of the working-classes. What the people of this country wanted was, that every man who was willing to work and fit for work should have work to do. (Loud cheers.) The working-classes only wanted fair wages. They were willing to give the fair value of labour for them. (Hear.) The rights of labour had been recognised in France; and the rights of labour must be recognised in England. Let them not take the leading articles of aristocratic newspapers as the public voice; but let them listen to the shout which they would now

The preparations for his departure were in the meantime made with all possible despatch; and in the course of a few hours Charles Hatfield took leave of his family, and hastened to Markham Place, to join the suite of the new Sovereign of Castelcicala.

CHAPTER CLVIII.

MRS. MORTIMER IN LONDON.

MRS. MORTIMER,—as we must now call her whom we have already known as Mrs. Slingsby, Mrs. Torrens, and Mrs. Fitzhardinge,—arrived in London two days after the scene which took place between her daughter and herself in the Rue Monthabor at Paris.

The wily woman was intent upon accomplishing the aim that had brought her back to the English metropolis; but, as the reader may well imagine, she had not the least trace of her husband—nor the slightest clue to his whereabouts. Indeed, it was

hear from thousands of people met to express their adhesion to the principles of liberty. (Loud cheers.) This meeting had been called to oppose the income-tax. Let them shew by their cheers that they were opposed to all oppressive taxation. But let them be peaceable. Let there be no disturbance. Let them shew the police and the Government-spies in plain clothes, that the working-classes of England could conduct themselves in a quiet orderly manner when met to discuss their wrongs. Mr. Reynolds sat down amidst the most vociferous cheering."

In the evening of the same day we attended another "monster meeting" held on Clerkenwell Green, on which occasion the following outline of the speech which we delivered was given by the *London Telegraph* and other newspapers:—

"Mr. Reynolds, the well-known author, next spoke at some length. He drew attention to the meeting which had taken place that day in Trafalgar-square, and commented on the aggressive conduct of the police. The time, he also contended, was come, when they ought no longer to mince matters. (Cheers.) The people of France had really done their duty, and it now remained with the people of this country to do the same. They were bound to demand their rights by every moral means; and if they were forced to have recourse to bloodshed, their oppressors would have to account for the result, not themselves. (Cheers.) He rejoiced at the exhibition of feeling that had taken place in France. (Cheers.) The people had raised a man to power, who had turned round and sought, by a large array of armed forces, to crush them. (Groans.) They, however, he rejoiced to find, gave him his deserts, and hurled him from his throne. (Cheers.) He was now in this country—an exiled villain. (Cheers.) Far, indeed, was it from him (the speaker) to wish that the tyrant should be molested or disturbed while suffering in a foreign land the pangs of remorse. No; he wished him to remain harmless and in insignificance. (Hear, hear.) But he did not see why the gallant and noble people of France were to be insulted by the feelings of sympathy which Her Majesty and some other personages were exhibiting towards the exiled tyrant. (Hear.) He complained of this, and particularly that the people of England should be identified with the anti-liberal opinions of those persons. (Hear, hear.) What, if the gallant people of France were to be so exasperated as to declare war against this country, would the hard-working people of England, Scotland, and Ireland consent to be war-taxed because of the caprice of a number of individuals—(no, no)—who, while wallowing in luxury, had no sympathy whatever with the masses of their fellow-creatures suffering from sickness and starvation? Mr. Reynolds, at some length, very ably and forcibly dwelt on the evils of class-legislation, and showed, from his writings, that he had ever been the friend of the working-men. He concluded, amidst much cheering, by proposing the first resolution."

only a conjecture with her that he was in London at all;—but she had worked this suspicion up into a certainty in her own mind; and the object she hoped to gain was quite important enough to lead her to resolve upon leaving no stone unturned in order to arrive at a successful issue.

On setting foot in the metropolis, she took up her abode at a small coffee-house in an obscure street in the Borough of Southwark; and having assumed a somewhat mean attire, she repaired, in the dusk of the evening after her arrival, to the vicinity of the dwelling which in former times bore the name of Torrens Cottage.

This house, as the reader will recollect, was situated between Streatham and Norwood; and the old woman, who knew the world well, and read the human heart profoundly, calculated that Torrens, impelled by that inscrutable and mysterious curiosity which prompts persons under such circumstances, was likely, if indeed in London, to visit the neighbourhood where he had once dwelt, and which had proved for him the scene of such dire misfortune.

Mrs. Mortimer knew that Torrens had passed many happy days at that cottage, and had there cherished the grandest hopes of acquiring a great fortune by means of building-speculations: she was also aware that he had at the same place bargained for the sale of his daughter's virtue—beheld the ravisher lying murdered upon the sofa—and been arrested on suspicion of the heinous crime. The place, then, was replete with the most varied and conflicting reminiscences for the old man; and Mrs. Mortimer said to herself, "The morbid feelings which must exist in such a heart as his, will probably induce him to visit the neighbourhood of the house that once was his home."

Such was her calculation; and, acting upon this impression, she sped on foot towards the dwelling where she had once dwelt a few brief hours as the wife of the man whom she was searching after.

It was nine o'clock in the evening when she turned into the lane where twenty years before Tom Rain had robbed Frank Curtis of the two thousand pounds.

In a few minutes Mrs. Mortimer came in sight of the cottage, the walls of which were glistening white amidst the summer evening semi-obscurity; and her heart beat quickly as she thought of the long—long time that had elapsed since she last saw that spot where she also had been arrested on a capital charge!

What changes—what vicissitudes had marked her existence since that epoch!

She had been in Newgate, and had there given birth to a daughter, who had accompanied her into exile:—the daughter had grown up—had become as profligate, though not altogether as criminal as her mother—and had at length defied the authority of that parent who thus surpassed her in the extent of her iniquity!

Yes—many and striking had been the events that had characterised the old woman's career since last she saw those white, glistening walls:—but there was the cottage apparently unchanged in outward appearance,—although it was more completely hemmed in by trees than when she quitted it upwards of nineteen years back.

For the large trees which were there in her time, had grown larger, and the saplings had expanded into trees also;—and a high, thick, verdant hedge surrounded the garden.

"Ah!" thought the old woman to herself, as she sped down the lane, "I could almost wish that the cottage was mine, and that I might retire with a competency to this sweet seclusion, no more to commingle in the strife and turmoil of the great—the busy—the jarring world. But this may not be! My life is destined to be stormy until the end. I feel that it is—and I must yield to the destiny that urges me on!"

Melancholy sentiments had risen up in her soul as she gave way to these thoughts; but their current was suddenly cut short—or rather diverted into another channel, when, emerging from the lane, she found herself in front of the cottage.

A light was visible through the shutters of the parlour—that very parlour where Sir Henry Courtenay was murdered, and whither she herself was borne in a fainting fit, after having been arrested in the hall on a charge of forgery.

A cold shudder crept over the old wretch, hardened and heartless as she was: for she remembered all the acuteness—all the intensity of the anguish she had experienced, what she had awakened to consciousness on that dread occasion, and found herself in the custody of the servitors of justice.

Exercising, however, a powerful control over her feelings, she stepped up to the front-door, and knocked boldly,—not in a sneaking, timid, uncertain manner, but with firmness and decision.

The summons was almost immediately answered by a pretty-looking, neatly-dressed, and very respectable servant-maid of about eighteen or nineteen; and Mrs. Mortimer's eyes now commanded a view of the hall where the constables had made her their prisoner,—that fatal incident which became as it were an ominous and most conspicuous finger-post in the road of her chequered existence!

"Can I be permitted, without causing inconvenience, to speak a few words to your master or mistress?" inquired Mrs. Mortimer, subduing the feelings aroused by the reminiscences of the past, and addressing herself to the business of the present.

"Surely you must have made some mistake," said the servant-girl, speaking, however, in a mild and respectful tone. "No gentleman resides here."

"Then allow me to see your mistress, young woman," persisted Mrs. Mortimer, slipping two half-crowns into the maid's hand.

"I will carry your message to my mistress," said the domestic coldly, and at the same time indignantly repulsing the proffered bribe. "Walk in, if you please."

Mrs. Mortimer entered the hall; and as the light of the lamp suspended to the ceiling now fell fully upon her, the servant-maid saw that she was somewhat meanly dressed, and that her countenance was none of the most pleasant to look upon. The impression thus made upon the domestic was not particularly favourable towards the old woman; but the girl was artless and unsuspicious naturally, and therefore strove to smother a feeling which she fancied to be uncharitable towards a complete stranger. She was therefore about to enter the parlour to deliver the message of the visitor, when the door of that room suddenly opened, and a beautiful young creature, of about nineteen, made her appearance.

We must pause for a few minutes to describe the being that burst, like a seraphic vision, upon the amazed and dazzled sight of Mrs. Mortimer.

Picture to yourself, reader, a tall, sylph-like figure of exquisite symmetry, reminding the observer of the Grecian models of classic female beauty,—with the deeply-hollowed back—the swelling chest and bosom, well matured but not voluptuously large—and the high, swan-like neck on which the oval head was gracefully fixed;—then fancy a countenance of the most agreeable expression and rare loveliness, with eyes not very large, but of the deepest black and most melting softness, and with brows finely arched and somewhat thickly pencilled,—a forehead lofty and smooth, and over which the raven hair was parted in two massive, shining bands,—a nose with the slightest trace of the Roman curve, and with the nostrils pink as delicate rose-leaves,—a small mouth, the least thing plump and pouting, and revealing teeth small, even, and white as pearls,—and a complexion of a clear, living white, with the carnation flush of health upon either cheek;—picture to yourself all this assemblage of charms, gentle behaviour and you will then have a complete idea of of all the charming creature of nineteen, who suddenly appeared on the threshold of the parlour-door.

We may, however, add, ere we resume the thread of our narrative, that this beauteous being was attired in a white dress, with a high corsage, and that she wore no other ornaments than a pair of earrings, and a fancy ring on one of her taper fingers.

Advancing towards Mrs. Mortimer, she said in a musical voice and a kind tone, "I think I overheard you request a few minutes' interview with the mistress of this house —"

"Such was indeed the favour I solicited," observed the old woman, hastily. "If my presence would not inconvenience you for a little while,—and if you will accept my sincere apologies for the apparent obtrusiveness of the request, as well as for the lateness of the hour at which it is made —"

"Oh! pray do not deem it necessary to excuse a proceeding which I am sure you will explain to my satisfaction," interrupted the young lady, with a sincerity which emanated from the artlessness of a disposition entirely unsophisticated. "Walk in, madam," she added, in a kind and by no means ceremonial tone, as she conducted Mrs. Mortimer into the parlour, the door of which the servant-maid immediately closed behind them.

Mrs. Mortimer now found herself in the very room which was fraught with so many exciting and varied reminiscences for her. The golden lustre of the handsome lamp which stood upon the table, was shed upon the scene of those crushing incidents that had suddenly made her a prisoner for a forgery which she had committed, and her husband a prisoner on a charge of murder of which he was innocent!

The old woman sank into a chair, and gazed around her with no affectation of emotion. The appointments of the room were changed—materially changed, it was true: but her eyes, nevertheless, recognised full well—oh! full well—the very spot where had stood the sofa on which she had awakened to the consciousness of her desperate condition,—the spot, too, where Torrens was standing when the officers arrested him on suspicion of the murder of Sir Henry Courtenay!

For a few minutes the old woman was powerfully affected by the recollections thus vividly conjured up; but, at length calling all her courage to her

aid, she regained her self-possession—and then a rapid survey made her acquainted with the elegant and tasteful style in which the parlour was now fitted up. All the furniture seemed to be nearly new. Upon the table in the middle were several drawings, in pencil and in water-colours, lying in an open portfolio—a box of paints and brushes—and several prettily bound volumes of the best modern English poets. Where a sofa had been placed in the time when Mrs. Mortimer last knew the cottage, a handsome upright pianoforte now stood; and in the nearest corner was a magnificent harp. On the cheffoniers in the window-recesses were porcelain vases filled with flowers; and to the walls were suspended several excellent pictures, the subjects of which were chiefly landscapes. Everything, in a word, denoted the chaste elegance and delicate refinement of the taste that had presided in the fitting up of that room.

Mrs. Mortimer, having recovered her self-possession, turned towards the young lady, who had been watching her with mingled interest and surprise.

"You will pardon me," said the old woman, "if I were for a few moments overcome by reminiscences of an affecting nature —"

"Compose yourself, madam—pray, compose yourself," interrupted the beauteous girl, in a sweet tone and winning manner; for not only was the most artless amiability natural to her, but she thought she perceived in the language of her visitor something superior to what the condition of her apparel and her personal appearance generally would have otherwise led her to infer.

"Never can I sufficiently thank you for the urbanity—the kindness, with which you treat me, my dear young lady!" exclaimed the old woman. "But am I not intruding upon your leisure—perhaps keeping you away from some companion —"

"Oh! no—I am all alone here," said the young lady, with an ingenuous frankness that excited a feeling of interest—almost of admiration, even in the breast of such an one as Mrs. Mortimer. "When I say alone," continued the beauteous creature, "I do not of course allude to the servants—because they cannot be called companions, you know; although the old housekeeper is very kind and good-natured; and Jane—the maid who gave you admission just now—is a sweet-tempered girl."

"And is it possible that you dwell here in complete seclusion?" demanded the old woman, rendering her voice as mild and her manner as conciliating as possible.

"Oh! I am accustomed to this seclusion, as you style it, madam," exclaimed the young lady, gaily: "for years I have lived in this manner, with my books—my music—my drawings;—and I am very happy," she added, in a tone which left not a doubt as to the sincerity of her statement. "At the same time," she continued, after a few moments' pause, and in a somewhat more serious voice, "I could wish that my dear papa visited me a little oftener—and that circumstances, of which I am however ignorant, did not prevent —"

"What! does not your father live with you, my dear young lady?" asked Mrs. Mortimer, surveying her with the most unfeigned surprise.

"Alas! he does not," replied the artless girl, her looks and her tone now becoming suddenly mournful: but, in the next moment, her countenance

brightened up, and she observed, "At the same time I am wrong to give way to sorrow in that respect, since my dear father assures me that the reasons are most important—most grave——"

She checked herself: for it suddenly struck her that she was bestowing her confidence upon one who was a total stranger to her, and that such frankness might possibly be indiscreet.

"And your mother, my dear lady?" said Mrs. Mortimer, interrogatively.

"I never knew her," answered the lovely creature, in a low and almost sad tone. "But I have been all this time wearying you with remarks and revelations concerning myself—forgetting that I should have first suffered you to give the promised explanation relative to your visit. You may address me as Miss Vernon—or Agnes Vernon, if you choose: for that is my name. And now, tell me the object of your call."

Mrs. Mortimer gazed in astonishment upon the charming being who was seated opposite to her. Never had the old woman beheld so fascinating a specimen of infantine artlessness and unsophisticated candour. There was nothing artificial—nothing unreal in Agnes Vernon: the innocence of her soul—the purity of her mind—the chastity of her thoughts, were apparent in every word she uttered and in every feature of her bewitching face!

Yes—the old woman gazed long and ardently upon the sweet countenance of that young creature, —gazed as if in an adoration forced upon a savage mind by the apparition of some radiant being from a heavenly sphere!

"Madam, I am waiting for you to reply to me," said Agnes, looking down and blushing deeply, beneath the steadfast gaze thus fixed upon her.

"A thousand pardons, Miss Vernon," exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer, recovering her self-possession. "I was lost in thought: many—many reflections, of a varied and conflicting nature, pressed upon my mind,—for I must inform you that I was once the occupant of this beautiful little house——"

"Indeed!" ejaculated the young lady, who now began to suspect—or, at least, thought that she had obtained a glimpse of—the motive which had brought her visitor thither. "You have come, then, to cast your eyes upon a spot which is familiar to you?"

"Precisely so, Miss Vernon," said the old woman. "And now let me announce myself to you as Mrs. Mortimer. I am the widow of a General in the army, and have only just returned from India."

"Oh! then I can well understand, my dear madam," cried Agnes, firmly believing every word that was said to her,—*"I can well understand your anxiety and longing to visit the place where you doubtless once dwelt with the husband you have lost."*

"You have read my purpose accurately, Miss," said the old woman, wiping her eyes as if she were moved to tears by reminiscences of the past.

"But this is most singular, indeed!" suddenly exclaimed the young lady.

Mrs. Mortimer gazed upon her with astonishment; for the observation that had just escaped Miss Vernon's lips was as extraordinary as the impulse which had prompted it was mysterious.

"Yes," continued the beautiful creature: "this is indeed most singular!"

"Are you surprised at my boldness in thus ob-

truding myself upon your presence?" asked Mrs. Mortimer, fixing her eyes in a searching manner upon the charming countenance of the young lady: "or do you doubt the existence of the sentiment which brought me hither?"

"Oh! no—no, madam!" exclaimed Agnes, in a tone of the deepest sincerity, while her features suddenly betrayed the grief which she experienced at being suspected of what she would have regarded as a cruel scepticism. "I am sure you could have no other motive for coming hither than the one you alleged: but I said it was singular—because, another person—a few days ago——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Mrs. Mortimer, a sudden idea striking her: in a word, she already felt confident that her visit would not prove abortive, and that she had acted with sagacity in seeking the first trace of Torrens at the very house which he had inhabited years ago.

"You now appear to be surprised in your turn," observed Agnes, ^{ep} by the ejaculation which had burst from the ^{as sh} woman's lips.

"Yes, dear you," ^{all the} said Mrs. Mortimer; "I was indeed surprised—inasmuch as I gathered from your words that another person, actuated by the same sentiment as that which brought me to this spot——"

"And do you know *that other person*, then?" inquired Agnes.

"That is precisely what I have now to ascertain," answered the old woman. "The moment I understood the sense of your observation respecting the visit of another individual to the cottage, I began to wonder whether it were any friend of my earlier years—perhaps even a relative——"

"He was an old man, with grey hair and a careworn countenance," said Agnes, perceiving that Mrs. Mortimer paused and seemed to be deeply affected; "and he told me that he also had once dwelt in this house. He sat down in this very parlour, and appeared to be overcome with grief for a long time. I offered to leave the room, that he might be alone with his mournful reflections: but he conjured me to stay. And then he informed me that he had known griefs so profound—vicissitudes so terrible—privations so great, that they had almost driven him mad; and, when I proposed in as delicate a manner as possible to afford him such relief as my means would permit, he assured me that he was poor no longer, and that he had gold at his command. Then, in another moment, he exclaimed, with an emphasis which almost frightened me—*'But, oh! that I were indeed the penniless, half-starving wretch I was some days ago'*——"

"Ah! he said *that*—did he?" muttered the old woman to herself. "Remorse has already overtaken him—and he will the more easily yield to my menaces and become my victim!"

"I did not catch your observation, madam," said Agnes.

"I was only musing, my dear child," hastily responded Mrs. Mortimer, "upon the misfortunes of this strange world of ours. Doubtless some dreadful affliction had touched the brain of that poor old man of whom you have been speaking."

"Such was indeed my fear," exclaimed Agnes; "and, much as I pitied him, I confess that I was greatly relieved when he took his departure."

"Was his visit a long one, my dear young lady?" asked Mrs. Mortimer.

"He remained here for upwards of an hour," was the reply.

"And was it in the evening that he called?" inquired the old woman.

"Yes—between eight and nine o'clock; and he rose from his seat as the time-piece struck ten," responded Agnes. "I know not precisely wherefore—but it is nevertheless true that his presence began to alarm me, although I had done him no injury, and indeed had never in my life seen him before. But there was such a wild expression in his eyes —"

"Ah! doubtless the poor old man was overcome by many painful recollections," said Mrs. Mortimer. "I suppose he did not mention his name to you, Miss Vernon?"

"No—and I did not like to ask him," was the frank and ingenuous reply. "His mind was evidently much unsettled,—for it alternated between a profound grief and a restless excitement—so that while he was here, I was at one moment moved to sympathise with him, and at another forced to regard him with vague apprehension. When he spoke of the fact that he himself had once been the occupant of this dwelling, he glanced hastily around the parlour, and murmured three or four times in a tone scarcely audible, '*This is the very room—the very room!*' I could not divine what he meant, and of course dared not ask him," added Agnes, with that charming ingenuousness of manner which denoted the pure child of nature, untainted by the artificial formalities of a vitiated state of society.

"How long have you resided here, Miss?" inquired the old woman, after a brief pause, during which she reflected on all that the beautiful girl had just told her,—at the same time chuckling inwardly at the certainty of having ascertained two grand facts: namely, that Torrens was possessed of plenty of gold, and that he was in London.

"I have lived in this pretty house for nearly three years, madam," answered Agnes. "Before that period I—But now," she added, checking herself, "I am again troubling you with my own affairs, whereas you have sufficient upon your mind to engross all your attention. Oh! yes—you must have," exclaimed the artless girl,—"having only just returned to England after so long an absence in India! But you did not tell me whether you recognised in the old gentleman of whom I have been speaking, any relative or friend—any person, in fine, in whom you are interested."

"Yes, my dear young lady," responded Mrs. Mortimer; "methinks that he cannot be altogether unknown to me;—and yet, my thoughts are so bewildered at this moment—the reminiscences which have been awakened in my mind by this visit to a spot where I myself once dwelt, and where I have passed so many happy hours with my dear deceased husband, General Mortimer —"

"Oh! do not weep, madam—compose yourself, I beseech you!" exclaimed Agnes, whose unsuspicious soul was touched by the grief which her artful visitor simulated so aptly.

"Dear young lady," murmured Mrs. Mortimer, pressing Miss Vernon's hand to her lips, "you will perhaps allow me to visit you again?"

"Oh! certainly," was the reply, given with cheerful and unaffected cordiality. "You are the widow of an officer of high rank—and therefore I cannot be doing wrong by receiving you at my house. At

the same time," added Agnes, after a moment's reflection, "I do not imagine that my father —"

But the young lady's remark was cut short in the middle by a loud knocking at the front-door. Mrs. Mortimer started up, as she felt that she was an intruder, and that her business there was of an equivocal character not likely to stand the test of any inquiry that might be put by a person less artless and unsophisticated than Miss Vernon herself: but that young lady, having a pure conscience, and not dreaming that she had even acted with imprudence in permitting a stranger to foist herself upon her, said in a cheerful manner, "Oh! it is my father's knock—I know it well! You need not be uneasy."

At this moment the parlour-door opened, and the pretty maid-servant appeared on the threshold to usher in a gentleman of whose personal appearance we must give a brief description.

CHAPTER CLIX.

MRS. MORTIMER'S ADVENTURES CONTINUED.

THE individual alluded to was a man of middle height, of rather spare form, and slightly bowed—so that although his years in reality had scarcely numbered sixty, a casual beholder might have pronounced him to be above seventy. A closer observation would, however, have dispelled this first impression; for his features were handsome and well-preserved, his teeth remarkably fine, and his hands entirely free from those wrinkles which usually appear upon the fingers of persons in the winter of their existence. His hair was of that iron grey which showed that it still retained a faint shade of its former blackness; and baldness had not even begun to rob him of any part of that natural covering. He wore no whiskers; and his countenance was smooth, but pale. In a word, his frame still preserved much of its pristine vigour; though its spariness and the slightly curved back were calculated, as above mentioned, to impress a casual observer with the idea that the individual whom we are describing was older than in reality he was.

We have said that his features were handsome; and we should now state that their general expression was pleasing, conciliating, and agreeable. Amiability of disposition, generosity of heart, and an acquaintance with affliction, were easily read upon that calm, pensive countenance; but, commingled therewith, was an air of serene dignity which bespoke a consciousness of some kind of superiority—whether of rank, wealth, or intellect, could not, however, be immediately decided by the observer. At all events, the person whom we have now introduced to our readers was not one to be passed by with indifference, nor confounded with the ordinary mass of mankind. We must, however, explain that he was rather characterised by a distinguished air of good breeding and consummate politeness than by aristocratic hauteur; at the same time there was so much dignity and loftiness about him as to debar even the most obtrusive and unceremonious from taking advantage of that blandness of disposition which was expressed by the countenance. We have only to add that he was dressed with taste, if not elegance; and the reader has before him as perfect a picture as we can draw of the personal appear-

ance of the individual who now entered the parlour of the cottage.

The moment he had crossed the threshold of the room, Agnes sprang towards him, saying, "My dearest father, I am delighted to see you! But let me hope that nothing unpleasant has caused this late visit."

And, as she spoke, she embraced with almost infantine tenderness the parent who affectionately returned her caresses.

"Nothing unpleasant, my dear child," was the reply; and then the young maiden's father cast an enquiring glance towards Mrs. Mortimer.

"This lady," said Agnes, "is the widow of a General who recently died in India; and, having herself occupied the cottage many years ago, she felt anxious, on her return to England, to visit the place which had so many pleasing and some melancholy associations for her."

"The lady is most welcome," observed the gentleman; "and her name —"

"Is Mrs. Mortimer," added Agnes: then, with ingenuous affability, she said, turning to the old woman, "Madam, permit me to introduce my beloved father, Mr. Vernon."

But Mr. Vernon bowed coldly, and even eyed the visitor suspiciously, as he observed, "I was not aware that any General-officer bearing the name of Mortimer had recently died in India."

"My deceased husband," said the old woman, with admirable presence of mind, "was not in the English service. He was in that of the Honourable East India Company."

"I was not aware," repeated Mr. Vernon, still in the same chilling tone, "that there were General-officers in the service of the East India Company. Madam," he continued, now fixing his gaze sternly upon her, "wherefore have you come hither?—on what pretence have you intruded yourself upon the sacred privacy of my daughter?"

"The motive was the one which Miss Vernon has explained to you, sir," replied Mrs. Mortimer, whose self-possession had been for a few moments considerably disturbed by the confident manner in which the young lady's father had exposed her second falsehood.

"Then, if that motive were really the true one, madam," he said, his sternness again changing to freezing politeness, "your object is probably gained by this time; and, as it is now ten o'clock, you will perhaps have the kindness to leave me with my daughter."

"Oh! assuredly, sir," exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer, glad of an opportunity to escape from the house; and Mr. Vernon, with constrained courtesy, hastened to open the door to afford her egress.

The old woman breathed more freely when she was once more outside the walls of the cottage; for the sudden advent of the young maiden's father had not a little embarrassed, even if it had not altogether discomfited her.

But no sooner was she in the open air, when she began to ask herself a thousand questions as she retraced her way up the lane.

What meant the mystery which evidently hung around the present occupant of the cottage?—wherefore did that charming creature dwell there alone?—why was her father only a visitor, instead of being a resident at his daughter's abode?—and for what aim, or through what motive, was so fair a flower buried in such seclusion?

That Agnes was indeed the pure, innocent, artless creature which she appeared to be, the old crone was sure. Too well acquainted with the world was Mrs. Mortimer not to perceive that the ingenuous *naïveté* of the young girl was real and natural, and not artificial and assumed. For an instant the impure imagination of the wretch had suggested that Miss Vernon might only be the pensioned mistress of some wealthy individual; but in another moment that hypothesis was altogether discarded. No: Agnes was not tainted with even the slightest—faintest shade of immorality: her mind was innocence itself—and her chastity as unblemished as the driven snow. Even the old woman, whose life had been so tremendously disolute, was compelled to embrace this conviction; but the very experience which she herself had gained in the sphere of licentiousness, dissimulation, and guile, helped Mrs. Mortimer to arrive at that unquestionable conclusion.

Who and what, then, was Agnes Vernon;—who and what was her father?

Mrs. Mortimer was a person having an eye to her own individual advantage in every circumstance which, coming under her cognisance, seemed to present a chance of affording scope for her selfish, interested, sinister interference. Wherever a mystery appeared, there she beheld an opportunity for her officious meddling: this officious meddling led to the discovery of secrets and to the eliciting of revelations:—and the information thus gleaned became a sort of marketable commodity with Mrs. Mortimer. In a word, she would seek to gain the confidence of those who had matters of importance to communicate, so that she might subsequently render herself so useful as to deserve payment, or at all events acquire the position of one who could exact a good price for her secrecy respecting the things so imprudently entrusted to her.

Calculations in accordance with this disposition on her part, and having reference to the cottage which she had just left, were passing in her mind as she sped along the lane,—when, midway in that narrow thoroughfare, she was overtaken by some one who had hurried after her, but whose footsteps she had not heard, in the pre-occupation of her thoughts, until they were close behind her.

She stopped—turned round—and beheld, by the bright starlight, a tall young gentleman, apparently handsome so far as she could distinguish his features, and dressed in an elegant style.

"Pardon me, my good woman," said he, "for addressing you; but observing that you came from the cottage yonder—"

"Yes, sir—I did," interrupted Mrs. Mortimer, who, in her eagerness to learn the motive of the young gentleman's accosting her, gave him encouragement to proceed.

"Tell me," said he, speaking with an equal impatience,—“tell me—do you know the beautiful creature who dwells in that seclusion? But of course you must know her—you have been there—perhaps in her company—"

"I have only just left her presence," observed Mrs. Mortimer.

"And you are well acquainted with her, then?" cried the young gentleman, eagerly.

"Perfectly well," was the answer. "But wherefore these questions?"

"Oh! if I could trust you!" ejaculated the stranger, in a tone that alike proffered and invited confidence.

"You can—you may," said the old woman, impressively.

"If I were assured of that, I would reward you well," was his next remark.

"How can I prove that I am trustworthy?" demanded Mrs. Mortimer.

"By telling me all you know concerning the beautiful creature who resides in that strange seclusion," responded the young gentleman.

"Then you yourself know nothing of her or of her affairs?" said the old woman, interrogatively.

"Nothing—absolutely nothing—save and except that she is the most lovely being that mortal eyes ever beheld!"

"You are not even aware that she has resided there for these three years past?" observed Mrs. Mortimer, assuming a mysterious tone as if about to become more communicative.

"Yes—that fact I have learnt," replied the young gentleman; "and also that her name is Agnes Vernon. I have moreover ascertained that an elderly gentleman visits her occasionally;—and I have sometimes harboured the worst fears— But, no—no," he exclaimed, suddenly interrupting himself and speaking in an impassioned tone: "such suspicions are no doubt foully injurious to that charming creature! I have contemplated her, myself being unseen, for hours together when she has been walking in her garden,—and purity, innocence, artlessness are written upon her spotless brow—traced in every lineament of her bewitching countenance. Oh! if I could only obtain the assurance that the old man who thus visits her were a relation—a guardian—or a valued friend,—that he is nothing more to her than —"

"I can relieve you of this suspense, sir," said Mrs. Mortimer, "and thereby give you a proof of my readiness to assist you. The elderly gentleman whom you have seen visiting at that cottage, and who indeed is there at this moment —"

"Yes—yes—I saw him enter," exclaimed the young man, impatiently. "But who is he?"

"Her father!" answered Mrs. Mortimer.

"Her father!" repeated the stranger. "Oh! that is scarcely probable! You are deceiving me:—you are pretending to give me explanations relative to mysteries which are likewise enigmas to you,—or you are purposely deluding me! Her father!—impossible! What—would a parent leave his daughter—and that daughter so transcendently lovely—to dwell in such utter seclusion —"

"Such is indeed the case, sir," interrupted Mrs. Mortimer; "and I have little cause to thank you for thus boldly and even insolently accusing me of wilfully deceiving you."

And, as she thus spoke, the old woman moved rapidly away, well knowing that the young gentleman would not part with her in this manner.

"Stop one minute—stay—I beseech you—and pardon me!" he exclaimed, hastening after her. "I was wrong to address you in such a style: I insulted you grossly—and I crave your forgiveness. But I was bewildered with the intelligence you gave me: mingled joy and surprise deprived me, as it were, of my reason. I imagined the information to be too welcome and too extraordinary to be true!"

"And yet you are now sought to persuade yourself that Agnes Vernon was chaste and pure, though you were then ignorant of the connexion subsisting between herself and the elderly gentleman who visits her—a connexion which, previously to the

explanation I have given you, must at least have appeared suspicious, and calculated to raise the most serious misgivings in your breast."

"I admit that my conduct is most inconsistent," exclaimed the young gentleman, in answer to these reproachful words: "but I love Agnes Vernon—I adore her—I worship the very ground upon which she treads —"

"And you have never yet spoken to her?" asked the old woman.

"I have never dared to intrude myself so far upon her notice," was the reply: "and yet she has seen me frequently in the neighbourhood —"

"But she never gave you the least encouragement, sir," interrupted Mrs. Mortimer, as if making an assertion, instead of throwing out a remark for the sake of gleanings of information.

"Never—never!" exclaimed the young man; "and therefore did I think so well of her character, in spite of the suspicious circumstances attending her seclusion."

"You have, then, the vanity to suppose that if the beautiful Agnes could have smiled upon any man, you were destined to be that happy one;"—and, as Mrs. Mortimer made this remark, her voice assumed a somewhat caustic tone.

"Oh! you have misunderstood my words," cried the stranger. "I intended to have you infer that I had never seen any thing in the demeanour and deportment of Agnes Vernon save what is becoming to a young lady of good birth, gentle breeding, and taintless soul. At the same time," he added, proudly, "I flatter myself that there is nothing particularly disagreeable in my personal appearance, as there is assuredly everything favourable in my social position. But of this Agnes is ignorant; and I am desirous to obtain an interview with her—or to write to her in a respectful manner —"

"And what has hitherto prevented you from doing either?" asked Mrs. Mortimer.

"I have already told you that I dared not accost her. Often and often have I longed to burst through the green hedge which has concealed me from her view, and throw myself at her feet: but an invisible hand has restrained me—and I have experienced a species of awe for which I could not account, and which has made me feel as if I were in the vicinity of a goddess. Then, as to writing to her," continued the impassioned young man, "I was once bold enough to commit a few words to paper—and I endeavoured to persuade the young servant-girl to give the note to her mistress."

"And she treated you with contempt," said Mrs. Mortimer, anticipating the fate of the *billet* from the fact that Jane, the pretty domestic, had so indignantly rejected her own proffer of five shillings.

"You have guessed rightly—and now I am more than ever convinced that you are well acquainted with the honest, upright, disinterested character of the dwellers in that cottage," said the young gentleman.

Mrs. Mortimer remained silent for a few minutes. She was absorbed in thought. Should she enter into this new affair which seemed almost to force itself upon her? or had she not enough already upon her hands? She had promised to rejoin her daughter Laura by a particular day in Paris; and there was not much time to lose. Nevertheless, she had a good week, or even more, at her disposal—providing that she was speedily successful in



tracing out Torrens; and, all things duly considered, she fancied that she might as well undertake a business which promised remuneration, and which would probably place her in a condition to learn secrets and dive into mysteries, a knowledge of which might prove serviceable in the hands of such an intriguing, mercenary disposition as her own. Moreover, the larger were her own special resources, the greater was her independence in respect to her rebellious daughter; and therefore, after a short interval passed in deep reflection, she said, "Sir, I am both ready and able to serve you. But my time is precious now, and will be so for a short time to come. Five days hence I will attend to any appointment that you may name."

"I will give you my card," said the young gentleman: "and I shall expect you to call upon me in the evening of the fifth day from this date."

"Agreed!" ejaculated the old woman, as she received the card. "My name is Mortimer; and, although you do not address me as becomes my position, I can assure you that I am a lady by birth, education, and —"

She was about to say "conduct;" but the young gentleman interrupted her timeously enough,

though unwittingly on his part, to prevent her giving utterance to the atrocious lie;—for he observed, as he thrust his purse into her hand, "Pardon me, madam, if I have not behaved courteously towards you: but I presume that your circumstances are not as flourishing as they ought to be, and gold is no object to me. Five days hence we meet: till then, farewell."

And, without waiting for any reply, he hurried away.

Mrs. Mortimer followed along the lane not with any purpose of watching him, but simply because her own route lay in the same direction. The echoes of his retreating steps, however, soon died in the distance; and the old woman sped along until she reached that public-house where, as the reader may remember, Tom Rain and Clarence Villiers met on the night of the elopement nearly twenty years before.

Approaching the window, whence a bright glare streamed forth, Mrs. Mortimer examined the card that had been placed in her hands, and, to her astonishment, found that the hero of her most recent adventure was Lord William Trevelyan, and that his residence was in Park Square. She knew enough

of the English peerage to be well aware that the nobleman whom chance had thus thrown in her way was the second son of the Marquis of Curzon, a peer of immense wealth, and who permitted his three male children—all fine young men—to enjoy each a separate establishment for himself, for which purpose he allowed them handsome incomes.

Mrs. Mortimer was therefore well pleased at the encounter which she had that evening made; and in more ways than one was she rejoiced at having visited the cottage in the neighbourhood of Streatham,—especially as the purse which Lord William had given her contained thirty guineas.

An omnibus passing at this moment, the old woman entered the vehicle, and alighted in the Borough. She was speeding homeward—that is to say, to the coffee-house where she had fixed her temporary abode—when, as she was threading a narrow street that offered her a short cut to the place of destination, she was suddenly struck by the certainty that a man who was walking slowly in advance, and whom she had nearly overtaken, was neither more nor less than the object of her search!

For, as he had turned to cast a rapid, stealthy glance around, the light of a lamp had beamed fully upon his countenance;—and that countenance, altered though it were, was too well known to the old woman not to be immediately recognised.

Yes: there indeed was Torrens,—there—in her power—within a few paces of her;—and thus had accident once more materially served his malignant, evil-intentioned pursuer.

Mrs. Mortimer was so excited by this sudden discovery, that she was compelled to pause for a moment and lean against a wall for support. But, almost immediately afterwards recovering her energy and presence of mind, she hastened on, and came near enough up with Torrens to behold him enter a house of mean and miserable appearance.

"Now you are in my power!" muttered the old woman to herself, but in reality apostrophising the individual who was still her husband: and, without another moment's hesitation, she knocked at the door of the dwelling.

Some minutes elapsed before it was opened; and at length a dirty, slipshod drab of a girl made her appearance.

"I wish to speak to the man who has just entered here," said Mrs. Mortimer, unceremoniously pushing her way into the narrow, dark, and unpleasantly smelling passage.

"Oh! you means old Mr. Smith what lives down stairs, I des say," observed the girl.

"I have no doubt of it," returned Mrs. Mortimer, officiously closing the street-door. "Come, my dear, show me the way—and I will give you sixpence for yourself."

This promise acted like magic upon the girl, who forthwith fetched a lighted candle from a room opening from the passage, and conducted the old woman to a precipitate flight of steps, down which she pointed, saying, "There—right at the bottom: the door faces you."

Mrs. Mortimer placed the promised gratuity in her hand, and the girl held the candle high up to light her as she desco ded.

"That will do, my dear," said the old woman when she had reached the last step of the dangerous

flight; and the girl disappeared, leaving the place in utter darkness.

Before the candle had been thus removed, however, Mrs. Mortimer had hastily reconnoitred the locality; and, applying her hand to a latch, she opened a door, and in another moment found herself in the presence of her husband!

CHAPTER CLX.

THE HUSBAND AND WIFE.

THE place where the husband and wife met thus, after a separation of upwards of nineteen years, was what the poor term "a kitchen," but which rather merited the designation of "a cellar." The roof was low and arched—the rough brick-work of the walls, once smeared with white-wash, was now dingy all over—and in the day-time a gleam of light was admitted by means of a miserably small window protected and also darkened by a grating set in the foot-way of the street. The den contained a fire-place, where the inmate might cook his victuals if he were able to bear the intolerable heat of a fire in the midst of summer; and at the extremity facing the window was a small bed. A table, two chairs, a few articles of crockery, and a washing-stand, completed the appointments of this wretched place, which was dimly lighted by a solitary candle.

The reader is already aware that Torrens was much altered in personal appearance: nevertheless, his wife had recognised him in the street without any difficulty. But it was not precisely the same on his part: had he met her in an accidental manner, he would not have known her, so remarkable was the change that had taken place in her. Yet he did know her now—for he had seen her in the little parlour at Percival's house; and the moment she stood before him on the threshold of his present hiding-place, a cry of horror and alarm escaped his lips.

Mrs. Mortimer closed the door, and, taking a chair, motioned her husband likewise to be seated—a kind of command which he mechanically obeyed; for something told him that he was in the power of the woman whom he hated and abhorred.

"We meet after a long, long separation," she said, in a low tone, which left him still in utter doubt as to whether the object of her visit was peace or war.

"Yes—yes," he observed, nervously. "but wherefore should we meet at all?"

"Not to exchange caresses and endearing words—not to unite our fortunes or our misfortunes, as husband and wife," responded the old woman. "Of that you may be well assured!"

"Then, again I ask—wherefore should we meet?" demanded Torrens.

"Because this interview suits my purposes," returned Mrs. Mortimer, with a malignant grin; "and I may as well commence by assuring you that you are completely in my power."

"In your power!" repeated the old man, casting a ghastly look of mingled apprehension and appeal on her who thus proclaimed her authority, and who seemed resolved to exercise it.

"Yes—in my power," she exclaimed, in an impressive manner. "Do you know that I was arrested on suspicion of being the murderer, or at all events concerned in the murder—"

"Murder! oh—my God!" moaned Torrens, clasping his hands together in convulsive anguish, as he glared wildly around.

"Do not affect ignorance of the fact," said Mrs. Mortimer: "because you are doubtless well aware that I *was* arrested for your crime."

"No—no: you cannot prove that I did it—you can prove nothing!" cried Torrens, with a species of hysterical violence.

"I can prove that you were the murderer of Percival," responded the old woman, fixing her eyes sternly upon her husband.

"Liar—wretch—I defy you!" exclaimed Torrens, his energy suddenly reviving as he saw the absolute necessity of meeting with boldness a charge which he felt convinced his wife could not prove against him: for how could she possibly entertain anything more serious than a bare suspicion?

"Harsh words and abuse will not intimidate me," said she, in a quiet voice; "and all these variations in your manner—nervousness at one moment, terror the next, and then excitement—only tend to confirm me in my ideas. Listen, old man—and see whether I have just ground for those ideas, and whether you could explain away my tale, if told to the nearest police-magistrate."

Torrens groaned audibly, and fell back in his chair—but not insensible—only in the exhaustion of his physical and the prostration of his moral energies; and his eyes glared in consternation on the countenance of the accusing fiend whose very presence would have been intolerable, even if he had committed no crime for her to be able to accuse him of.

"Listen, I say," resumed the implacable old woman. "You were at Percival's house a few moments before myself and daughter called upon him. You seemed to be very miserable—so miserable that you wished to obtain assistance from him. These were the very words he used to me; and he observed likewise that he never *gave*—consequently you extorted nothing from him. But you watched through the window-shutters, from the outside, the interview which took place between him and myself and daughter: you beheld the gold and the notes displayed upon the table; and when the old miser was once more alone, you entered the house—and you murdered him with a bludgeon!"

Torrens started convulsively, and endeavoured to give utterance to an ejaculation of denial; but his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth, and his throat was as parched as if he had been swallowing ashes.

"Yes—you murdered him," repeated Mrs. Mortimer, apparently dwelling with fiendish delight upon the horrible accusation: "you beat the wretched man to death—your blows were dealt with a cruel, a merciless effect. Then you plundered the iron safe—you took all the treasure contained in the tin-case—gold and bank-notes to the amount of several thousands of pounds!"

"It is not true—it is not true!" said Torrens, partially recovering the power of speech.

"But it *is* true—all true—precisely as I now repeat the details," cried Mrs. Mortimer, emphatically.

"You are mad to think me the possessor of such a treasure, when you find me in this miserable place, with thread-bare garments, and surrounded by every proof of a poverty amounting almost to

utter destitution," said Torrens, his courage to meet the charge somewhat reviving as he flattered himself that the argument just used was decisive and unanswerable.

"Do you imagine me to be so thoroughly ignorant of the world as to become your dupe on such easy terms?" demanded the old woman, in a tone of withering scorn. "Look at all I have passed through, and then ask yourself whether it be possible to deceive and mislead me! No, no—I understand it all. You believe that suspicion will never fall upon the wretched inmate of such a wretched place," she continued, glancing slowly around the cellar—"and your calculation is a correct one. Here might you have concealed yourself—here might you have passed some weeks in apparent poverty, until the storm should have blown over. But it was destined that one person should obtain a clue to your guilt and a trace to your lurking-hole—and that person is myself! Nay, to convince you how well all your late proceedings are known to me, I have only to mention the fact that a few days ago you visited the cottage which once bore your name—"

"Ah!" ejaculated Torrens, startled by this new proof of how well-informed his hated wife in reality was concerning his movements.

"Yes—and to the fair inmate of that dwelling," she added, with a look full of malignant meaning, "you admitted that you were poor no longer, but that you wished you indeed were the penniless and half-starving wretch you had so recently been! Thus the very outpourings of your remorse, old man, have furnished me with arguments—damning arguments—against you, and confirmed all my previous suspicions, if such confirmation were for an instant needed."

"Why do you now come to me?" asked Torrens, in a faint and faltering tone, while his entire frame trembled nervously, and his countenance became so ghastly, that it was absolutely hideous to behold.

"My purpose is stern and immovable," replied the old woman.

"And that purpose—is—" faltered Torrens, trembling like an aspen.

"The surrender of every shilling—yes, every shilling—of the treasure which you plundered from the murdered Percival," was the answer.

"Malediction!" ejaculated the wretched man, starting wildly from his seat as if he had received a sudden wound: then, sinking back again through sheer exhaustion, he pressed his hand to his throbbing brows, murmuring and lamenting in broken sentences such as these:—"My gold—my notes—the treasure I lost my soul to gain—the riches I had hoped to enjoy—the wealth to acquire which I imbrued my hands in blood—the blood of a fellow-creature—no—no—you shall not have my treasure."

And he started up, flinging his arms wildly about him, while his eyes rolled horribly in their sockets, as if he were attacked by delirium.

Mrs. Mortimer sat calm and motionless, resolved to allow the paroxysm to pass ere she reiterated her stern demand. She knew—she saw that he was in her power,—now more so than ever, since he had admitted the dread crime by his unguarded exclamations.

"Woman, you will drive me mad!" suddenly cried her husband, falling back again into his seat, and

looking at her with a hyena-like rage expressed upon his countenance.

"I do not seek such a catastrophe," she observed, coolly.

"But you are urging me to it," he replied, with savage fierceness. "No—no—I will not surrender my gold; you cannot compel me!"

"It is for you to decide whether you will adopt that alternative, or pass hence in a few minutes to the nearest station-house," responded Mrs. Mortimer, her voice being still characterised by a calmness and deliberation indicative of the most implacable sternness of purpose.

"The station-house!" moaned Torrens, with a cold shudder: then, again becoming dreadfully excited, he exclaimed, "I will die first—and you shall perish also! Yes—I will murder you, and afterwards—"

"This is child's play!" said Mrs. Mortimer, laughing at the threat, as she took up a knife which lay upon the table. "Advance towards me another pace—and I will plunge this sharp blade into your heart. The treasure, which is no doubt concealed somewhere in the room, will then fall into my hands all the same."

"You are determined to rifle me of all I possess—to plunder me—to make me penniless!" cried Torrens, falling back in his seat, and giving way to his despair. "Can nothing move you? But, listen—listen: I will give you half—yes—one-half of the whole amount—"

"I came not to receive terms, but to dictate them," interrupted Mrs. Mortimer. "And now reflect well upon your position, old man;—and remember also that your wild ravings may draw listeners to the door, and your guilt will be no longer a secret existing between you and me. Then, naught—naught, can save your neck from the halter!"

"My God! she speaks truly," murmured Torrens, bewildered by the dreadful thoughts that rushed to his brain as the woman spoke so calmly and deliberately of the ignominious death which might overtake him: "yes—she speaks truly!" he repeated; "and yet, if I give up all—surrender everything—on what am I to live? how am I to sustain my miserable existence?"

"You had no kind thought—no compassion for me, when you had friends to help you, and I was banished across the wide ocean," said Mrs. Mortimer: "you cared not what became of me at that time, Torrens—and I have now no pity, no sympathy for you! I am aware that you loathe and detest me;—but your aversion surpasses not that which I entertain for you. There we are well matched: it is however in our relative positions that I have gained the ascendancy and can wield the authority of a despot. My crime is of old date, and has been expiated by many long, long years of horrible exile and servitude in a penal colony: your crime is new—the blood is scarcely dry upon your hands—your victim is scarcely cold in his grave—and your guilt can only be expiated on the scaffold."

"Spare me—spare me," groaned the wretched man, clasping his hands together in an anguish which, assassin as he was, would have moved any other than the soul-hardened, implacable Mrs. Mortimer.

"Spare you, indeed?" she repeated in a contemptuous tone: "in what way can I spare you? If you ask

me not to betray you into the hands of the officers of justice, I at once reassure you on that head—but with the one condition that you surrender up to me, and without further parley, every sixpence of the amount you have secreted somewhere in this place. I do not seek your life; I wish you to live, that you may be miserable—that you may know what starvation is—that you may wander the streets, houseless and penniless—dependent upon eleemosynary charity—begging your bread—"

"Merciful heaven! it is a fiend who is addressing these frightful words to me now!" ejaculated Torrens, surveying his wife with horror and astonishment.

"No—it is a woman,—a woman whom you deserted in her bitter trouble, and who now wreaks her vengeance upon you," said Mrs. Mortimer. "Carry back your reminiscences some nineteen years or upwards, and contrast our positions then. You found friends and relations to console you while still in gaol, and to assist you after your release. But did you come near me? did you even send a word or a line to sympathise or to proffer aid? Miserable wretch that you are, I could wish that you were ten thousand times more miserable still!"

"Oh! that's impossible—impossible!" exclaimed Torrens, his cadaverous countenance denoting, by its hideous, painful workings, the sincerity—the profound sincerity that prompted the averment he had just made. "Were you to search the earth over, you could not find a being more miserable than I! And now—and now," he continued, in a faltering tone, while tears trickled down his furrowed cheeks,—“now, will you have compassion upon me?"

"No—ten thousand times no!" ejaculated Mrs. Mortimer. "And I warn you to hasten and surrender your wealth—or I shall lose all power of restraining my impatience."

Torrens rose from his seat, cast one look of malignant—diabolical hate upon the merciless woman, dashed the traces of grief away from his cheeks, and then turned towards the bed.

Mrs. Mortimer followed him with her eyes—those eyes now so greedy, suspicious, and anxious lest by any possibility her prey should escape her!

The wretched old man, whose heart experienced all the pains of hell, slowly and with trembling hands raised the miserable mattresses; and from beneath he drew forth a small parcel, wrapped in brown paper and tied with a thick string. This he handed to Mrs. Mortimer, who, heedless of the terrible glance which accompanied it, hastened to open the packet and examine its contents.

And now her triumph was complete;—for the parcel enclosed gold and notes to an amount which she proceeded in a leisurely manner to compute.

"Five thousand four hundred pounds," she said aloud, casting a malignant look upon Torrens, who had resumed his seat and appeared to be the victim of a despair that must terminate in the total wreck of his reason. "And here," she continued, now musing to herself rather than speaking for his behoof,—“here is a document that may prove of some importance to me,—the promissory note of the young man who called himself *Viscount Marston*."

Thus speaking, she carefully packed up the parcel once more, and secured it about her person.

"And you will not leave me a guinea—a single guinea?" asked Torrens, in a low, hollow voice—

his entire aspect indicating that he was almost stupefied by the merciless cupidity of his wife.

"Not a single guinea," she replied. "The only consolation I can afford you is the assurance that your secret is safe with me. If you are ever sent to the scaffold—it will not be through my instrumentality."

With these words, she retreated towards the door, walking backwards, so as to keep her eyes fixed upon Torrens the whole time, and thus be prepared for a sudden attack should he meditate mischief, or, in an ungovernable paroxysm of rage and despair, attempt it.

But the old man moved not from his seat, although he appeared to reel and sway unsteadily backward and forward in his chair; and at the moment when Mrs. Mortimer placed her hand on the latch, he fell heavily upon the floor.

She was about to depart when it struck her that, if he were dead, unpleasant suspicions might attach themselves to her, should she hurry away without raising any alarm; and she accordingly hastened towards him. He was senseless—but the spark of life was not extinct; and now through fear, did the woman perform those duties to which she never could have been otherwise urged in respect to him. She raised him in her arms—she placed him on the bed—removed his neckcloth—and sprinkled water upon his face. In a few minutes he began to revive, and his eyes opened slowly.

"Where am I?—is it a dream?" he murmured in a faint tone: then, as his recollection returned with speed and vividness, and he knew the countenance that was bending over him, and remembered why the woman herself was there, he exclaimed, "Fiend! give me back my gold!"

"Never!" was the emphatic word that fell upon his ear in reply—and in another moment he was alone.

No—not alone: for Despair was now his companion.

And Despair is an appalling guest:—for, murderer as the man was, he had some kind of worldly consolation left in his treasure until the implacable woman wrested it from him. But now that only solace was gone—and he was left to the horror of his thoughts, and to the ghost of his victim. Beggary was before him—beggary, with all its hideous train of evils, and those evils rendered the more terrible because beyond loomed the black and ominous gibbet!

Oh! how was it that madness did not seize upon the old man's brain, and rob him of the power of making these agonizing reflections?

Was it that his punishment was to begin upon earth? If so, assuredly the retribution was appalling, even on this side of the tomb;—and he had not even left to him the consolation that the gold for which he had bartered his soul was still in his possession—still at his command, and available for his use!

CHAPTER CLXI.

AGNES VERNON AND HER FATHER.

WE must now return to the cottage near Streatham, where we left the beautiful and artless Agnes Vernon with her father.

The moment the old woman had quitted the

house, Mr. Vernon turned towards his daughter, and, taking her hand, said, "My dearest child, how came you to admit a complete stranger into your presence in so unguarded a manner?"

"As I had never seen her in my life before, dear father," replied the charming girl, "I could not for an instant suppose that she had any evil intention in visiting the cottage; because, having done her no harm—"

"But, my beloved Agnes," interrupted her parent kindly, as he made her sit down near him as he also took a chair, "I have often told you that the world contains many wicked people, who frequently harbour the basest and most infamous designs towards young women who are pretty and unsuspecting as you; and this Mrs. Mortimer, as she calls herself, may be one of the class I have alluded to."

"I am sorry indeed that I should have acted in a way to cause you any displeasure, my dearest father," said Agnes, her eyes filling with tears; "but—"

"You do not understand me, my sweet child," again interrupted Mr. Vernon, passing his hand affectionately over her glossy hair, and pure, polished brow; "I am not angry with you—indeed, it would be impossible to experience any irritation with such an amiable, excellent girl as you are. But I am alarmed lest evil-disposed persons should seek to do you an injury—and therefore I recommend caution and prudence on your part."

"I cannot comprehend how the old lady who was here just now could possibly seek to harm me," said the amiable Agnes, "since I have never harmed her, and, on the contrary, treated her with the respect due to her years and her afflictions."

"What did she tell you, my love?" inquired Mr. Vernon.

Agnes forthwith related, in her own natural, simple, yet agreeable manner, the entire conversation which had passed between herself and Mrs. Mortimer.

Her father listened with earnest attention; and for some minutes after she had ceased speaking, he remained absorbed in deep thought.

"You are not pleased with the incident of this evening," said Agnes, at length, and speaking in a timid voice, as she gazed with anxious fondness on her parent's pensive countenance.

"Once more I assure you, my well-beloved child," he responded, "that I am not angry with you. But you will, perhaps, be somewhat surprised to hear me declare that I do not believe one syllable of all the old woman told you. In the great world, Agnes, there is no such thing as that sentimentalism and sympathy which she professed to be the motives that led her to visit the cottage ere now. I detected her in two falsehoods—and I have every reason to suspect all the rest."

"But was it not natural, dear papa, for her to be desirous to behold once more the scene where she had passed many happy days with her deceased husband?" inquired Agnes. "Oh! I can well understand such a feeling—and I therefore honoured and respected her for entertaining it."

"Yes—there are a few generous hearts that would experience such sentiments," observed Mr. Vernon; "for perhaps I was too hasty ere now in the sweeping condemnation which I levelled at what I termed the great world. At the same time, Agnes, you must not judge the world by your own pure and unsophisticated soul. And would to God that experience might never be destined to teach you other

lessons than those which seclusion and good training have already inculcated: would to God that you might never be compelled to look upon the dark side of human affairs!"

"Have I other lessons to learn—other teachings to undergo—other experience to acquire, beyond what I already know?" asked the ingenuous and candid Agnes.

"Alas! yes—and in a variety of ways," responded her father, with a sigh. "You have as yet seen only one phase of the world—that of tranquillity, serene happiness, and peace. You have not even heard the storms of that world in the distance. Hitherto your life has been passed under the most genial influences; and you know nothing—absolutely nothing, of what may be termed *life*. Again I say, therefore, how deeply—how earnestly it is to be wished that your mind may never become acquainted with the bitter teachings of vicissitude or misfortune."

"I am already well aware, my dear father, from my historical studies and from the perusal of the books which you have selected for me, that mankind pursues many and varied conflicting interests, and that *gain* is the chief object thus sought after. But I am still at a loss," continued the beautiful Agnes, "to understand how people can be wicked enough to injure others who have never injured them, and when the infliction of such injury can confer no benefit upon the individual who is guilty of such flagrant wrong. Suppose, for instance, that this Mrs. Mortimer who was here just now, should in reality entertain some evil design towards me, how could she possibly acquire any personal advantage from the pursuit of such conduct?"

"You are as yet too innocent—oh! far too innocent, if not too young, to understand these matters," said Mr. Vernon, gazing with all a father's affection upon his beauteous and artless child. "Neither is it for me to remove the film from your eyes in this respect."

"And yet, dear papa," she observed, with the most endearing, amiable *naïveté*, "if no one will point out the shoals, rocks, and quicksands to me, how can I possibly avoid them? You see that just now I erred by receiving that person too frankly—too cordially——"

"And the old man who called the other evening, too," said her father, with a smile. "Now, do you not perceive, my dear child, that there is something suspicious in these two visits, which indeed appear to have some degree of relationship to each other, and perhaps had the same instigation. I cannot conceive that accident should send two persons hither, separately and at a short interval, on the same pretence, unless they were acting in collusion. That such an accidental coincidence might happen, I admit; but prudence—worldly prudence, my love, makes us look suspiciously upon such events; and I confess that this is the light in which I view the present occurrences. The woman represented herself as the widow of a General who had lately died in India: now I happen to be so well-informed on these matters as to be enabled to state most emphatically that no General-officer of that name has existed for many years past. Finding herself at fault in respect to her first assertion, your visitor endeavoured to make good her tale by means of a second; but the falsehood was equally palpable in this latter case. Now, therefore, my dearest Agnes, you comprehend that there are good

and just grounds for suspecting the motive which led her hither."

"Is it possible that persons can be so wicked?" exclaimed the young maiden.

"It is, alas! too true," replied her father; "and therefore you cannot be too much upon your guard in respect to strangers. I wonder that Mrs. Gifford did not represent to you the impropriety of allowing the old man to force his way into your presence a few days ago——"

"Both Mrs. Gifford and Jane spoke to me on the subject after he was gone," said Agnes, desirous to rescue her two servants from blame: "but I fancied their timidity had made them conjure up visions of thieves and housebreakers, and I only laughed while they remonstrated."

"Then you now perceive, dear Agnes, that they were right in the observations which they undertook to address to you," said Mr. Vernon.

"Yes—and I am sorry that I did not listen with more attention," answered the amiable girl. "In future, my dear father, I will allow no one to enter the house unless he or she be the bearer of a letter from you."

"This is precisely what I could desire, Agnes," exclaimed Mr. Vernon; "and you will afford me unfeigned pleasure if you adhere to this resolution."

"You know that I will do all you enjoin—even without questioning your motives," observed Agnes, "Command—and I obey."

"My dear child, the word '*command*' exists not in the vocabulary that I have to use when conveying my wishes to you. So dutiful—so good—so willing are you, Agnes, that I have never had occasion to speak with imperiousness or harshness to you. You do not even question me concerning those matters which might naturally awaken your curiosity and your interest."

"It is sufficient for me to know that you desire me to dwell in this seclusion," said Agnes; "and as you have exerted yourself, my dearest father, to surround me with every comfort—every element of happiness, I should be indeed ungrateful and unjust were I to seek prematurely those explanations which you have promised to give me when the proper time shall arrive."

"And that time is not so very far distant, Agnes," said Mr. Vernon. "Two years more—and I shall no longer have any secrets from you. But while we are thus conversing, I forget that it is waxing late and that I have not even as yet begun to account for the sudden and unexpected visit which circumstances have compelled me to pay you this evening."

Agnes now regarded her parent with some degree of suspense; for his remark had brought back to her memory the circumstance that he had never called at so late an hour before, and, moreover, that this was the third time he had visited her within the week—an occurrence at variance with his ordinary habit.

"My dear child," said Mr. Vernon, speaking in the kindest tone possible, "I am compelled to leave England on urgent business to-morrow."

"Leave England!" repeated Agnes, tears starting into her eyes.

"Yes, my beloved—and I regret to add that my absence may be of some weeks' duration. Paris is the place whither this sudden and unexpected

business calls me; and though I shall be away from you, yet will you ever be present in my thoughts, and I shall write to you frequently."

"But how many weeks shall you be absent, my dear father?" asked Agnes, the pearly drops now chasing each other adown her cheeks.

"Eight or ten, my child," responded Mr. Vernon: "but at the expiration of that period you will be certain to see me again. Remember, Agnes, that far longer intervals than this have occurred during which we have been completely separated—"

"Yes, my dear father—when I was staying in the country with my governess, who is now no more," interrupted Agnes, unable to stifle her sobs: "but ever since her death I have seen you frequently—far more frequently."

"Because I removed you to this cottage which I purchased for you, and which is so much nearer to London than was Mrs. Clement's abode at St. Alban's. However, my sweet Agnes—compose yourself—cheer up—and wipe away those tears. I cannot bear to see you weep," he added, his own voice growing tremulous. "Two months or two months and a half will soon glide away; and I shall bring you a number of presents from Paris."

"You spoil me with your kindness, my dear father," exclaimed the beautiful girl, throwing her arms about his neck, and embracing him tenderly. "I am afraid that I must cost you a great deal of money—for you are always buying me something new. But then, you are very rich—are you not, dear papa?"

"Thank God, I am—and for your sake!" cried Mr. Vernon, returning her fond caresses. "The time will come, Agnes, when you will learn how powerful a talisman, in respect to happiness, is money. Some of the books which I have selected for you inculcate maxims against avarice, covetousness, and selfishness: while others even go further, and endeavour to prove that a moderate competency is more compatible with true happiness than an immense fortune can possibly be. But I much question whether the authors of those works would not have leapt at the chance of giving the truth of their assertions a fair trial through the medium of experience in respect to the possession of riches. Such books, however, do good; they infuse salutary thoughts into the mind—although the influence thereof must inevitably become subdued, if not altogether destroyed, in proportion as the individual advances in worldly knowledge, and finds worldly interests crowding upon him. Riches, my dearest Agnes, may become a blessing or a curse according to the manner in which the possessor uses them; and by this observation I believe that I shall have opened a new field for the exercise of your reflections and good sense."

"Oh! you have indeed, my kind father!" exclaimed Agnes. "But—to return to the object of your visit this evening—may I express a hope that the business which calls you to Paris is of no unpleasant nature?"

"By no means, my love," answered Mr. Vernon, smiling affectionately upon his amiable daughter. "And now I must take my departure—for it is eleven o'clock. You will remark, dear Agnes, the advice I gave you relative to the visits of strangers; for I should be unhappy indeed, if I thought that your artless, unsuspecting character were likely to be the very cause of exposing you to peril."

"You may depend upon my prudence in future,

dear father," said Agnes; "and I am rejoiced that you have given me such timely warning. Oh! who could have thought that the old man who seemed so deeply affected, and the woman who spoke so tenderly of her deceased husband, could have harboured any sinister design? It is really enough to render one suspicious of everything and everybody in future."

"No, my dear child—you must not fall into the opposite extreme," cried Mr. Vernon, hastily. "Because, for instance, a mendicant to whom you give alms should turn out to be an impostor, do not argue therefrom that all destitute persons are rogues. I do not wish distrust and suspicion to take the place of your generous frankness and amiable candour; but I am desirous that, while preserving the artlessness and ingenuousness of your disposition, you should at the same time adopt those precautions which common prudence suggests. And now, my sweet Agnes, embrace me and then retire to your own chamber—for, ere I depart, I have a few instructions to give to Mrs. Gifford, whom you will please to send hither to me."

The beautiful maiden once more threw her arms round her father's neck and covered his face with her kisses and her tears: then, having received his blessing—a blessing which he gave from the very bottom of his heart—she reluctantly tore herself away from his arms, and quitted the room.

In a few minutes Mrs. Gifford, the housekeeper, made her appearance. She was a woman of about fifty-six years of age—stout, respectable-looking, and with a countenance in which honesty and good-temper were alike read as plainly as the words in a book.

On entering the parlour, she closed the door carefully behind her; and then her demeanour suddenly became profoundly reverential as she advanced towards the father of her young mistress.

"Mrs. Gifford," said he, in a tone of friendly confidence, "I am about to visit Paris, and therefore thought it necessary to see you for a few moments, previous to my departure. Not that I need recommend my beloved child to your care—for I am well assured that you watch over her safety and her happiness as zealously as if she were your own daughter."

"Your lordship—" began the housekeeper, in a tone of the deepest respect.

"Hush!" exclaimed he whom we must still call Mr. Vernon, in spite of the aristocratic title by which Mrs. Gifford had addressed him: "remember that walls have ears, my good friend! I was about to observe to you that Agnes, through the amiable confidence and ingenuousness which are natural to her, has allowed two strangers,—one a few evenings ago—the other this very night,—to intrude themselves upon her; and I tremble lest their motive be a bad one. The gardener and his assistant invariably sleep in the out-house, I hope?"

"Yes, my—I mean, sir," answered Mrs. Gifford; "and they are resolute, determined men, who would not permit plunderers to enter these premises with impunity."

"Good!" exclaimed Mr. Vernon. "Did you yourself see the old man who called here the other night?"

"I did not, sir," replied Mrs. Gifford. "But Jane assured me his appearance was that of a man worn down with old age, wretchedness, and poverty rather than of an evil-intentioned person. Shall I

tell your lord—shall I tell you, sir,” said the good woman, hastily correcting herself, “what is my impression relative to that old man? Why, sir,” she continued, perceiving that Mr. Vernon nodded approvingly, “it struck me that it might be that Mr. Torrens, who used to live here many, many years ago, and of whom we heard such dreadful tales shortly after your lord—I mean, shortly after you bought the cottage.”

“But those tales—has Agnes learnt them?—have they reached her ears?” demanded Mr. Vernon, hastily: “because they might terrify and alarm her.”

“No, sir—she is entirely ignorant of all the legends attached to this house,” was the reply; “and it is not by any means likely that they can reach her ears. Jane is a discreet, good girl, and would not allude to them for worlds.”

“Thank God!” ejaculated Mr. Vernon; “for were Agnes to learn what we ourselves only heard after the entire purchase was concluded and you were located here,—were she to learn, I say, that a horrible murder had been committed in this house, I would at once procure her another dwelling. But you were speaking ere now about the very Torrens who was so unjustly accused of that foul crime.”

“I was observing, sir, that I fancied the old man who called here the other night might be he; for as Miss afterwards told me, he spoke of having lived here many years ago, and of the terrible misfortunes he had endured; and then he glanced round the parlour repeatedly, observing in an audible though anguished tone, ‘*This is the very room—this is the very room!*’ And *this is the room,*” continued Mrs. Gifford, “where the baronet was murdered; and therefore I conclude that the old man was none other than the wretched Torrens.”

“Your surmises are most natural,” said Mr. Vernon, after a few moments’ reflection. “But who, then, was the old woman that came just now? And yet,” he proceeded, “though I spoke of her lightly and irreverently as *an old woman*, I am bound to admit that there was really a something about her which gave me the idea of one who had seen better days. Her language was especially lady-like and correct. She said she had lived here many years ago—”

“And yet,” interrupted Mrs. Gifford, “the cottage was shut up for nearly eight years after the murder; and then the landlord into whose hands it had fallen, and who was a widower, came and resided here himself, as no one would take it. He occupied it until his death; and then your lord—and then, I mean, you purchased it, sir, together with the garden and orchard attached to it.”

“And what would you infer from all these circumstances?” inquired Mr. Vernon.

“That if the old woman really did live here many years ago, it must have been during Torrens’ time,” explained the housekeeper; “because he built the cottage, and resided in it until the murder; after which, as I just now said, it was shut up for a lengthened period. Now, strange though it may seem, an idea has likewise struck me relative to the old woman—or old lady—”

“And what is your idea?” asked Mr. Vernon.

“That she is that Mrs. Slingsby—or Mrs. Torrens, who got into trouble at the same time as the husband she had just married. If my conjectures are correct, sir, I do not think that you have any cause

for apprehension in the two visits which have been paid to the cottage.”

“I congratulate you upon the shrewdness which you have displayed in dealing with the subject,” said Mr. Vernon, smiling; “and I am inclined to adopt the views which your sagacity suggests. Perhaps, then, there is really nothing to fear: but, of course, Mrs. Gifford, you will exercise the utmost prudence and the most unwearied vigilance in regard to my darling child. You know how dear she is to me—you are also acquainted with the unhappy circumstances which force me to condemn her to this seclusion until she shall have attained her twenty-first year—unless,” he added, in a more measured tone, “death shall in the meantime snatch away that woman whom I cannot call my—”

“My lord! my lord!” exclaimed the housekeeper, in an imploring voice; “give not way to recollections which always excite you so painfully! With me your charming Agnes is safe—and you are well aware that I love her as much as if she were my own child! Besides, the deep—the many debts of gratitude which I owe to your lordship—”

“Hush! hush!” interrupted Mr. Vernon; “for again I tell you that the very walls have ears—and I would not that my rank should be even suspected—”

“Pardon me—I forgot your oft-repeated injunctions on that head,” said Mrs. Gifford. “But you must not suppose that because I am thus sometimes oblivious in your presence, I ever allow a single word to slip from my tongue that may create a suspicion in the mind of Miss Agnes or Jane.”

“And now, Mrs. Gifford,” observed Mr. Vernon, “I have one more question to ask you:—has that young gentleman who once dared to ask Jane to deliver a note to my daughter—has he ventured into this neighbourhood since?”

“I must confess, sir,” was the answer, “that I have seen him loitering about the cottage on one or two occasions: but as he never seeks to obtrude himself upon the notice of Miss Agnes, I have not thought it worth while, nor even prudent, to suggest to the dear young lady what course she ought to pursue in case he should address her. Besides, he appears to be a gentleman in every sense of the word; and I do not apprehend any rudeness on his part towards your daughter. Indeed, he appeared much humiliated and very penitent when Jane so resolutely refused to become the bearer of his missive or to receive his bribe.”

“You have acted with prudence: it would be unwise to make any observation to Agnes relative to this stranger, under present circumstances,” said Mr. Vernon. “Were you to speak to her on the subject, you must necessarily explain the nature of that sentiment which has attracted the young gentleman to this neighbourhood—and to talk to her relative to the passion of love, were to destroy some portion of that artless innocence—that infantine purity of soul, which characterises her. In a word, I trust my dear child to your care and discretion, Mrs. Gifford;—and I shall expect that you will write to me at least once a week during my absence.”

Mr. Vernon then wrote upon a slip of paper the address where letters would reach him in Paris; and, having next placed a roll of bank notes in Mrs. Gifford’s hands for the expenses of the little establishment until his return, he took his departure.



CHAPTER CLXII.

LAURA IN PARIS.

WE must now return for a short time to the beautiful, but licentious and profligate Laura, whom we left in Paris.

Although she reckoned materially upon her mother's aid in respect to her new designs, she nevertheless resolved to enjoy herself during the old woman's absence; and the thought even struck her that it was possible—though not very probable—for her to form some brilliant connexion without the assistance of her parent. At all events, she reasoned that there was no harm in making the trial; and therefore, the moment Mrs. Mortimer had taken her departure for England, Laura commenced her preparations for pleasure, and perhaps for intrigue.

She hired a private box at each of the principal theatres, and purchased a handsome carriage and a pair of beautiful horses; and then she engaged a celebrated artist to paint her portrait, well knowing that his *studio* was frequented by men of rank and fortune, and calculating that a view of the splendid countenance on the canvass would inspire

the liveliest curiosity to behold the living original. She likewise secured the services of an eminent musician to give her lessons in the divine art; and this gentleman, believing her to be highly respectable, introduced her to his wife, and invited her to a musical *soirée*, where her beauty and the report which had been spread to the effect that she was an heiress who had just succeeded to her property, rendered her the centre of attraction.

By the means just enumerated, Laura gained one grand object—an entrance into respectable society; and this difficult point was accomplished in less than four days after her mother's departure from Paris.

She soon began to be talked about—but not with suspicion. No—it was her transcendent beauty, that became the theme of discourse; and the admiration with which she had inspired both the French and English gentlemen at the *soirée*, rendered them so enthusiastic in her praise, that they unconsciously suffered themselves to be hurried into assertions guaranteeing her respectability and virtue, as well as expatiating on her charms.

Thus was it, for instance, that one of her French admirers would speak:—

"Never in my life did I behold so beautiful a creature as Miss Laura Mortimer, an English lady whom I met at the soirée last evening. What a pity it is that she cannot talk French: how sweet would our language sound when wafted by such a melodious voice! It is, however, fortunate that I myself understand the English tongue, or I should have been debarred the pleasure of exchanging a syllable with that houri. Hourri! Mahommed never dreamt of such a glorious creature! Her hair is of the richest brown that I ever saw—glossy, luxuriant, and shining: her forehead is of a height and width deserving to sustain a queenly diadem; and her eyes, large and brilliant, are of a dark grey when looked into attentively, but seem to be of a deeper hue to the casual observer. Then her teeth—never were beheld such pearls! But her form—her figure—oh, it were impossible to find words to describe the charms of that magnificent shape! A critic, having the ancient models of classic female beauty in his mind, would perhaps pronounce her bust to be in proportions too voluptuous; but let him contemplate that graceful slope of the shoulders—the arching of the swan-like neck—the fine expansion of the chest—the perfect roundness of the bosom—the just symmetry of the waist—and the dazzling whiteness of the charms revealed by the low corsage of the evening toilette,—let the admirer of ancient models behold all this, and he will soon confess that he would have nothing changed in the contours of Laura Mortimer's figure. Oh! she was indeed heavenly in her elegant, but tasteful attire; and the lustre of her eyes outvied the brilliancy of her diamonds. But, in addition to her faultless beauty, there is about her an air of virgin freshness that indicates a mind pure and untainted; though, at the same time, it is easy to perceive that Laura Mortimer is no inexperienced girl. She is, on the contrary, a young woman of fine intellect, proud soul, and independent spirit,—energetic, without being masculine,—firm, yet endowed with all the natural softness of her sex. That her passions are strong and her disposition even sensual, you may read in her eyes and in the lineaments of her aquiline countenance;—but that an honest pride enables her to put a curb upon her ardent imagination, is equally certain. Happy will be the man who shall win so inestimable a prize!"

"I understand," another enthusiastic admirer would observe, "that she is possessed of a fine property. Her deceased father, I am told, was a wealthy nabob; and she expects her mother shortly to join her in Paris. The old lady has gone to England to make certain transfers from the British to the French funds, in behalf of her daughter. Miss Mortimer is decidedly the most charming creature that ever burst thus suddenly upon the dazzled sight of the fashionable world in Paris. Oh! how I envy the professor of music who gives her lessons, and the artist who is painting her portrait! Never could I grow weary of contemplating that splendid countenance, or of listening to that voice so full of melody!"

In a word, within a very few days from the time when she took the handsome suite of apartments in the Rue Monthabor, Laura became the topic of conversation amongst all the nobles and gentlemen, French or foreign, in the fashionable quarters of Paris; and those who heard the praises so lavishly bestowed upon her by the envied few that had already formed her acquaintance, longed to be presented to this goddess of beauty!

One danger she incurred—and of this she was sensible: it consisted in the fact that the persons belonging to the hotel where she and Charles Hatfield had at first put up, and likewise the British chaplain and his clerk, were aware that she was married! But she calculated that the chances of detection or exposure at their hands were very insignificant and scarcely worth a thought: for even though any of the parties alluded to should meet and recognise her, they would believe themselves to be mistaken in respect to the identity of Laura Mortimer with Perdita Hatfield. Besides, Paris was a very large city; and months might elapse before such a meeting or recognition took place; and in the meantime she hoped to have so successfully conducted her intrigues as to be able to return to England in complete independence of her cohabitation with Mr. Hatfield.

It was on the sixth morning after Laura had taken up her abode in the Rue Monthabor that she saw a paragraph in *Galignani's Messenger*, the English journal published in Paris, announcing that His Sovereign Highness the Grand Duke of Castell-cala, who had just succeeded to that lofty rank in consequence of his father-in-law's demise, had arrived on the preceding evening in the French capital, on his way to Italy. The article, in the usual fulsome manner, stated that his Sovereign Highness intended to remain one day in Paris, in order to have a private interview with the King of the French; and the journalist proceeded to give a list of the noblemen and gentlemen composing the suite of the Grand Duke. In that category there was one English name;—and that name was CHARLES HATFIELD!

"Charles Hatfield!" exclaimed Laura, in astonishment, and scarcely able to believe the evidence of her own eyes; but a second reference to the paragraph assured her that she had indeed made no mistake. "Ah! I comprehend," she murmured to herself, as she laid the paper upon the breakfast table, at which she was seated; "this is the course that his stern father has adopted in order to throw him amidst new scenes, and remove him afar from the meridian of London as well as from that of Paris! He is to be sent into a species of ostracism in Italy, until he shall have been weaned from the lingering affection he entertains for me!"

Thus reasoning within herself, Laura rose from the sofa whereon she had been reclining, and approached a mirror, on whose bright and polished surface she beheld the glorious reflection of her countenance,—that countenance which was now radiant with the triumph that filled her soul.

"Yes," she murmured to herself, as she still continued to survey her image in the glass,— "his father is afraid that he will yet fly back to my arms—afraid that the magic of my beauty may once more draw him within the sphere of its influence!"

As these thoughts passed through her brain, her soul was filled with an ineffable exultation;—for she marked the flashing of her fine eyes, and the dazzling brilliancy of the teeth that appeared like pearls set between two rubies,—marked also the glow of rich carnation on her cheeks, in such striking contrast to the alabaster shoulders and swelling bosom whiter than Parian marble, and which, according to a habit produced by the natural voluptuousness of her temperament, were purposely left more than half exposed even when she was alone;—all those beauties—her own transcendent beauties—she be-

held reflected in the faithful mirror; and never was woman more profoundly conscious of the sovereign power which perfect loveliness exercises over the heart of man, than was Laura Mortimer on this occasion.

The reader has already seen enough of this young woman to be well aware that she was a most extraordinary character; and, though her conduct would in another often warrant the belief that she was made up of contradictions, yet with her those very deeds or thoughts that might seem to deserve such a name, were in reality in perfect keeping with a disposition to the reading of whose depths and intricacies the key of no ordinary experience of the female heart would serve.

Thus was it that a wild—a strange—and a daring scheme rose up in her mind, as, surveying her peerless charms in the polished mirror, she repeated to herself, "Charles Hatfield is in Paris! He will be in the capital for twenty-four hours; and in twenty-four hours so much may be done! May I not take the first step in my meditated vengeance—a small step, it is true,—and yet a commencement! Yes—at the same time I may prove the irresistible power of my beauty, and wring his recreant heart with a jealousy—a jealousy so keen, so acute, so galling that he shall writhe in agony of spirit, and yet dare not utter a word! All this I can do, and still not violate my compact with his father. For how run the conditions? Never to molest the young man in any way—never to return to England, but to fix my abode in some continental State—and never to reveal the fact of our marriage! Not one of those conditions shall I break by the plan which now engages my attention. For if we happen to meet in the same room, or at the same public resort, it cannot be said that I molest him. No:—and now for the execution of my project—a project that, in its carrying out, will excite in his breast the tortures of hell!"

And the beautiful mouth was wreathed into a smile of malignant—almost fiend-like triumph, as those last words came hissing between her pearly teeth—not borne upon a voice melodious as a silver bell, but in a tone so changed for a few moments, that had she spoken in the dark, with her own mother or Charles Hatfield present, but able only to hear and not to see, that voice would not have been recognised by them!

Rosalie, the adept and intriguing lady's-maid, was now summoned to hold a conference with her mistress.

"It is my intention to appear in the Champs Elysées this afternoon, attired in the most becoming manner," said Laura. "The day is gloriously fine, and the carriage will be open. I wish you to exercise all your judgment and your best taste in the superintendence of my toilette. Let me have no gaudy colours—nothing savouring of splendour. Chaste elegance must characterise my costume: in a word, Rosalie, let my beauty be enhanced by my apparel, without appearing to be in any way indebted to artificial means."

"I understand you, *mademoiselle*," said Rosalie; "and you may depend upon me."

"But now I wish to appeal to your ingenuity, my dear girl," proceeded Laura,—“having thus recommended myself to your good taste. Listen attentively! The Grand Duke of Castelcicala is in Paris; and his stay is limited to a few hours. Charles Hatfield,” she continued, sinking her voice

almost to a whisper, as if the very walls had ears, “is in his suite; and I am desirous that he—Charles Hatfield—accompanied by three or four other gentlemen in the Duke's service, should be allured by some means to the Champs Elysées this afternoon.”

"You wish that Mr. Charles and his companions may appear, either on foot or horseback, in the fashionable lounge at the time when you yourself will be there?" said Rosalie, interrogatively.

"You have expressed my desire with accuracy," observed Laura. "Does your imagination suggest any plan by which this aim can be accomplished?"

Rosalie reflected profoundly for upwards of a minute: then, suddenly turning towards her mistress, she said, "Can you tell me the names of any of the nobles or gentlemen in the Duke's suite, besides Mr. Charles Hatfield?"

Laura immediately directed Rosalie's attention to the paragraph in the *Messenger*; and the cunning lady's-maid, having perused it, exclaimed, "Will you leave this matter entirely in my hands, *mademoiselle*?"

"I will," answered Laura. "But, whatever be your plan, remember that you must not compromise me. All I demand or require is that Charles Hatfield, accompanied by three or four of his comrades in the Duke's service, shall visit the Champs Elysées this afternoon. The rest concerns me."

"I understand you, *mademoiselle*," said Rosalie: "you may trust entirely to my discretion, without entertaining the least dread of being in any way compromised."

The abigail then retired, and Laura was left alone to meditate upon the scheme she had thus set on foot.

How her dependant proposed to act, in order to accomplish that part of the design which had been entrusted to her, Laura could not conceive: nor indeed did she give herself much trouble to conjecture. She placed full reliance upon the tact, discretion, and ability of Rosalie; and regarded success as certain.

In order to while away the time, she turned to her writing-table, and examined a packet which her music-master had left with her on the previous evening. The enclosure consisted of English translations of several of the most popular French songs and national airs; and Laura set herself deliberately to the study of these pieces, well aware that an acquaintance with their tendency and spirit would prove of advantage to her in conversation.

The first manuscript to which she thus earnestly addressed herself, was a free version of that soul-stirring hymn, *La Marseillaise*:—

LA MARSEILLAISE.

Sons of heroes, famed in story,
Onward march to death or glory!
For see, the foemen's standard waves
O'er fields that soon must be their graves!
Hear ye the clashing of their arms—
Their shouts portending dire alarms?
Eager for slaughter, on they press
To make your children fatherless.
Then let each warrior grasp the gleaming brand,
And shed th' invaders' blood to fertilize the land!

Wherefore to our peaceful coasts
Rush those sanguinary hosts!

For whom have they prepared the chains
Which now they drag o'er verdant plains?—
Children of France, to us they come—
Those chains are forged to stamp our doom!
Just Heaven, that such disgrace should fall
Upon the free-born sons of Gaul!
Then let each warrior grasp the gleaming brand,
And shed th' invaders' blood to fertilize the land!

What! shall we, afraid of war,
Take from tyrant hands the law?
What! shall a foreign cohort's pride
Intimidate our warriors tried?
Great God! our necks can never be
Subject to despots' tyranny:
Nor shall th' invaders of the State
Decide upon its people's fate!
Then let each warrior grasp the gleaming brand,
And shed th' invaders' blood to fertilize the land!

Tremble! chiefs, perfidious all—
On your heads our curses fall!
Tremble! your projects, soon made vain,
Their merited return will gain:—
For France has armed her serried bands,
And placed her safety in their hands:
So that if hundreds fall to day,
To-morrow thousands join th' array.
Then let each warrior grasp the vengeful brand,
And shed th' invaders' blood to fertilize the land!

In the darkling battle's strife,
Soldier! spare your victim's life,
When, armed against you in the field,
Feeble and weak, he cries—"I yield!"
Him may'st thou spare: but to the grave
Shalt thou pursue the chief who gave
Such dire example to the rest
That tear for food their mother's breast!—
Then let each warrior grasp the vengeful brand,
And shed th' invaders' blood to fertilize the land!

Sacred fervour—patriot flame,
Urge us on to deeds of fame!
Freedom! assist the deadly blow
That we direct against the foe:
Conquest! may we to war be led,
Thy banners amply o'er us spread;—
And may the tyrant hosts retreat,
Or beg for mercy at our feet!
Then let each warrior grasp the gleaming brand,
And shed th' invaders' blood to fertilize the land!

The next manuscript which Laura studied on this occasion contained a translation of Casimir Delavigne's celebrated national air, written after the Revolution of 1830:—

LA PARISIENNE.

Gallant nation, now before you
Freedom, beckoning onward, stands:
Let no tyrant's sway be o'er you—
Wrest the sceptre from his hands!
Paris gave the general cry,
"Glory, Fame, and Liberty!"
Speed, warriors, speed,
Though thousands bleed,
Pierced by the leaden ball, or crushed by thundering
steed:—
Conquest waits—your foemen die!

Keep your serried ranks in order:
Sons of France, your country calls!
Gory hecatombs award her—

Well she merits each who falls.
Happy day! the general cry
Echoed "Fame and Liberty!"

Speed, warriors, speed,
Though thousands bleed,
Pierced by the leaden ball, or crushed by thundering
steed:—
Conquest waits—your foemen die!

Vain the shot may sweep along you,
Ranks of warriors now arrayed:
Youthful generals are among you,
By the great occasion made!
Happy day! the fervent cry
Echoed "Fame and Liberty!"

Speed, warriors, speed,
Though thousands bleed,
Pierced by the leaden ball, or crushed by thundering
steed:—
Conquest waits—your foemen die!

Foremost, who the Carlist lances
With the banner-staff has met?—
Freedom's rotary advances—
Venerable Lafayette!
Happy day! the fervent cry
Echoed "Fame and Liberty!"

Speed, warriors, speed,
Though thousands bleed,
Pierced by the leaden ball, or crushed by thundering
steed:—
Conquest waits—your foemen die!

Triple dyes again combining,
See the squadrons onward go:
In the country's heaven shining,
Mark the bold tri-coloured bow!
Happy day! the general cry
Echoed "Fame and Liberty!"

Speed, warriors, speed,
Though thousands bleed,
Pierced by the leaden ball, or crushed by thundering
steed:—
Conquest waits—your foemen die!

Heroes of that banner gleaming,
Ye who bore it in the fray—
Orleans' troops! your blood was streaming
Freely on that fatal day!
From the page of history
We have learnt the general cry.

Speed, warriors, speed,
Though thousands bleed,
Pierced by the leaden ball, or crushed by thundering
steed:—
Conquest waits—your foemen die!

Muffled drum, thy music lonely
Answers to the mourners' sighs:
Laurels, for the valiant only,
Ornament their obsequies!
Sacred fane of Liberty,
Let their memories never die!

Bear to his grave
Each warrior brave,
Who fell in Freedom's cause, his country's rights to
save,
Crowned with fame and victory!

There was one more translation from the French in the packet which had been placed at Laura's disposal: and this was a portion of Victor Hugo's celebrated

O D E,

WRITTEN AFTER THE REVOLUTION OF 1830.

O friends of your country, immortal in story,
Adorned with the laurels ye won in the fight;—
When thousands around you fell covered with glory,
Ye turned not away from the enemy's might;
But ye raised up your banners, all tattered and torn,
Like those which your sires had at Austerlitz borne!

Ye have rivalled those sires—ye have conquered for France:

The rights of the people from tyrants are saved:—
Ye beckoned to Freedom—ye saw her advance—
And danger was laughed at, and peril was braved.
Then, if they were admired who destroyed the Bastille,
What for you should not France in her gratitude feel?

Ye are worthy your fathers—your souls are the same—

Ye add to their glory, their pride, and renown;—
Your arms are well nerved—ye are noted by Fame,
That the laurel and oak may unite for your crown!
Your mother—'tis France! who for ever will be
The mother of heroes—the great—and the free!

E'en England the jealous, and Greece the poetic—
All Europe admired,—and the great Western World

Arose to applaud with a heart sympathetic,
When it marked the French banners of freedom unfurled.

Three days were sufficient to shake off the chain,
And ye proved yourselves friends to your country again!

'Twas for you that your ancestors traced round the earth

The circle of conquest, triumphant and glorious,
Which, extending to Cairo, from France took its birth,
And proceeded through slaughter, but ever victorious:—

'Twas for you they encountered the Muscovite snows,
Or in Italy plucked for their trophies the rose!

O offspring of heroes and children of Fame!
Applaud the achievements your sires did before you!

Extend their renown, while ye honour their name,
And fight for the banners that proudly wave o'er you.

Remember, Napoleon has oft cast his eye
Through the long serried ranks of the French chivalry!

Thou, Herald of Jupiter—Eagle of France!

'Tis thou that hast carried our thunders afar:
With thee for a sign did our armies advance—

With thee as their symbol, they went to the war!
Look around thee—rejoice! for the sons of thy land

Are worthy the sires that thou erst didst command!

And France has awakened from stupor profound,
And the watch-word has raised all her champions around;

And the din of their weapons struck loud on the ear,

As it hearkened the tread of the cavalry near.

But the tyrant has marshalled his warriors in vain,

And his culverins thundered again and again;—

For the stones that the citizens tore from the street,

Laid the cohorts of Royalty dead at their feet!

And their numbers increased—for they fought to be free,

And they poured on the foe like the waves of the sea,

While the din of the tocsin that echoed on high,

Was drowned in the fervour of Liberty's cry!

The tyrant has left you with sorrow and anguish,

Fair city—the glory of France and the world:

Three days have elapsed since in chains you did languish—

You have fought—you have won—and your banners are furled!

And wise were your counsels succeeding the strife—

For Revengo even smiled with the rest,

When Clemency bade her surrender the knife

Ere 'twas plunged in the enemy's breast!

The friends of the monarch with him are o'erthrown—

'Tis thus that a people its rights will defend;

For if Fate have determined the fall of a crown,

The schemes of the council accomplish the end.

The wretches! they deemed, in their insolent pride,

That France to their sceptre would bow;

But the Lord found them light when their balance

was tried,

And reduced them to what they are now!

And, oh! let the lesson for ever remain—

When we raise up a King, we are forging a chain.

When we humble our necks to a monarch, we make

A bond that we leave for our children to break;

Since the breath of a King is the spark to the pan—

The musket explodes, and its victim is—man!

Now let the funeral dirge be said,

And let the priests lament the dead:

But let them come with modest rest—

No more in tinsel splendour drest;—

No more with ostentatious air

Need they commence a lofty prayer:

No sign of worldly pomp should be

Mingled with aught of sanctity;—

Less welcome to the Lord on high

Is grandeur than sincerity!

Henceforth to the priest be all splendour unknown—

Let his cross be of wood, and his cushion of stone:

The church is his refuge—the church is his rest—

In her arms he is safe—in her care he is blest!

For when the volcanic eruption is red,

Like the froth of the wine-press that Burgundy fed;

When the sides of Vesuvius are glowing and bright,

When Naples re-echoes with cries of affright—

'Tis then that the groans of the children resound,

And mothers despairingly fall to the ground—

'Tis then that in vain they expend to the air

The half-uttered words which are meant for a

prayer;

"Then should I do well to remain in France, signor—rather than lead your nation into such a crime," said Laura, laughing gaily; and the rapid glance which she darted towards her husband convinced her that he was enduring the torments of the damned—torments which were increasing in proportion as she seemed to grow more friendly terms with the young Italian officer.

"I should be wretched indeed, beautiful lady," said he, in reply to her last observation, "did I think that any inconsiderate remark from my lips could deter you from carrying into effect a purpose already settled in your mind. Neither," he added, with a sigh, "am I vain enough to suppose myself to be of sufficient importance to sway you in one way or another."

"Nor am I vain enough to take in any sense save as a compliment the flattering observation you made just now relative to the reception I might expect at Montoni;"—and as Laura uttered these words, she cast down her eyes and blushed slightly.

The dialogue between the Castelician and herself had been carried on in a low tone, and was therefore totally inaudible to the other Italian and Charles Hatfield, who were gazing, but with very different feelings, on the lovely woman. Neither had the conversation occupied one tenth part of the time which we have consumed in detailing it;—and in the interval, the carriages originally behind that of Laura, had passed hers by, so that the stoppage of her equipage caused no obstruction. The tide of pedestrian loungers was likewise still flowing on—there being nothing singular nor unusual in the fact of a gentleman on foot paying his respects to a lady who rode in her carriage.

But while the multitude, generally, saw naught peculiar in the scene which we are describing, it was nevertheless one of deep interest. By the carriage door stood the young Castelician officer, his heart throbbing with the ineffable emotions which the wondrous beauty of Laura had excited, as it were by the wave of an enchanter's wand;—in the vehicle itself sat the syren—bending forward towards that handsome foreigner as if she were already interested in him, though in reality she experienced not the slightest sensual feeling in his favour—other considerations occupying her thoughts:—at a little distance stood the other Italian officer, gazing upon her with an admiration which he could not conceal, and envying his comrade the privilege which a lucky accident had given him to address the houri;—and there also was Charles Hatfield—ghastly pale, his limbs trembling convulsively, and his lips white and quivering with rage.

Yes; terrible—terrible were the feelings which Laura's husband experienced for the six or eight minutes that this scene lasted. There was a woman whose beauty excited universal admiration,—a woman in all the splendour of female loveliness;—and this woman was *his* wife—his own wedded wife,—a wife whom he could rush forward and claim in a moment, if he chose! And that woman was now coquetting before his eyes—coquetting with a studied purpose to annoy him. Oh! he could understand it all,—the means which had been adopted to induce him and his two companions to proceed to the Champs Elysées at that hour—the pretended accident of the parasol—and the smiles and tender looks which Laura now bestowed upon one who was entirely a stranger to her:—yes—all, all was now clear to Charles Hatfield,—and he was on the point

of springing forward—not to catch Laura to his breast and claim her as his spouse—but to upbraid and expose her,—when he suddenly recollected that a portion of the agreement entered into between his father and her, was to the effect that *she* likewise was to be secure against molestation or recognition on *his* part, as well as he on hers. This reminiscence compelled the unhappy young man to restrain his feelings; and as he was forced to subdue his ire, his jealousy only became the more painful, because it required a vent of some kind or another. He writhed—he positively writhed before her eyes;—and now he was humiliated as well as tortured to such an intolerable degree!

Laura had cast down her looks and had called up a blush to her smooth cheeks, when she made to the handsome Castelician the remark that we have last recorded: but almost immediately afterwards she raised her countenance again, and smiling with an archness so enchantingly sweet that it would have moved the rigid features of an octogenarian anchorite to admiration, she said: "At all events, signor, should I visit Montoni in the course of this summer, my stay would be very short—for I purpose to become a great traveller, and to travel very rapidly also. To-morrow I set out for Vienna."

"Vienna!" repeated the Castelician, in astonishment. "Surely Paris possesses greater attractions than the cold, dull, formal Austrian capital?"

"Oh! of that I must judge for myself," exclaimed Laura, laughing—at the same time showing by her manner that she thought their conversation had lasted long enough.

The young Italian was too well-bred to attempt to detain her: but it was nevertheless with evident reluctance that he stepped back from the carriage-door and raised his hat in farewell salutation. Laura inclined her head gracefully in acknowledgment of his courtesy, and the vehicle drove on rapidly, the way before it being now comparatively clear.

Oh! what triumph was in her heart, as she threw herself back in the carriage and reflected upon all the incidents of the scene that had just occurred,—a scene which had not occupied ten minutes, and which had nevertheless stirred up so many and such varied feelings! Her vanity had been gratified by the homage paid to her beauty; and her malignity had for the time been assuaged by the contemplation of the almost mortal agonies endured by her husband. She had asserted the empire of her charms over even the very heart that ought to cherish hatred against her: she had inspired with the maddest jealousy the soul that was bound to think of her with loathing and abhorrence. She felt all the pride of a woman wielding a sceptre more despotic than that of a queen,—a sceptre which was as a magic wand in her hand, casting spells upon even those who detested, as well as those who admired her!

CHAPTER CLXIII.

LAURA AND ROSALIE.

YES—it was a great triumph for Laura Mortimer,—a triumph all the greater, inasmuch as she knew that the agitation and rage of her husband could not speedily pass away; and that, when his friends had



leisure to observe his emotions and seek an explanation, he would not dare to afford them any!

She had, moreover, made statements to the young Castalcicalan which he would doubtless repeat to Charles Hatfield, whom they were well calculated to mystify relative to her future proceedings; for the reader scarcely requires to be told that she had not the slightest intention to repair to Vienna nor to visit Italy.

In every respect she had ample reason to be well satisfied with the results of the scheme she had devised in the morning and so effectually carried out in the afternoon,—a scheme so wild and having so many thousand chances against its success, that none save the intrepid, resolute, far-seeing Laura could have possibly hoped to conduct it to a triumphant issue.

Having proceeded to the end of the avenue, she ordered the coachman to retrace his way and return home;—but she was not destined to reach the Rue Monthabor without experiencing another adventure, which may for the moment seem trivial, but which was nevertheless destined to exercise no mean amount of influence upon her future career.

As the carriage was emerging from the Champs

Elysées, two gentlemen on horseback, just entering the fashionable lounge, were about to pass by, when one of them, recognising Laura, suddenly pulled up and made her a low bow. She immediately ordered the carriage to stop; for it was her courteous and obliging friend the professor of music, who had thus saluted her—and she was anxious to express to him the delight she had experienced from a perusal of the translations he had sent to her the preceding evening. After the exchange of the usual complimentary remarks, the professor, turning towards his companion, said, "My lord, permit me to introduce you to one of my fair pupils—my fairest pupil, I should rather observe," he added, in a good-tempered manner: "Miss Laura Mortimer—the Marquis of Delmour."

Laura was startled for an instant at finding her music-master in such aristocratic society; and as she inclined gracefully in acknowledgment of the nobleman's courteous salutation, she observed that his lordship was an elderly, if not actually an old man, but that his countenance was far from disagreeable.

A brief conversation ensued; and although the marquis had no opportunity of speaking more than

a dozen words, and even those on common topics, Laura nevertheless saw enough of him to be convinced that his manners were of polished elegance, and that his disposition was frank and unassuming.

It was not therefore without emotions of secret pleasure that she heard herself thus addressed by the professor of music:—

"Miss Mortimer, his lordship, and myself, are old acquaintances, and he permits me to call him my friend. His lordship will honour my humble abode with his presence, to-morrow, evening: there will be a musical soirée of the same unpretending kind as that which you yourself graced with your company the evening before last. My wife will doubtless send you the formal card; but may I in a less ceremonial fashion, solicit you to favour us with your presence?"

Laura signified the pleasure she should experience in accepting the invitation; and all the time she was listening to the professor and replying to him, she had the agreeable consciousness that the marquis was gazing upon her with an admiration which he could not repress. She however affected not to be in the slightest degree aware that she was undergoing such an impassioned survey; and when she turned towards his lordship to make the parting bow, it was with the formal reserve and yet graceful dignity of a lady to whom a stranger has only just been introduced.

The carriage rolled on in one direction—the horsemen pursued their way in another;—and while the Marquis of Delmour was putting innumerable questions to his friend relative to the hour when they had thus met, Laura was on her side resolving that Rosalie should without delay institute all possible inquiries respecting the position, fortune, and character of that nobleman.

We should here remind the reader that the professor of music was a man eminent in his special sphere, of high respectability, and great moral worth; and, moreover, he was a native of a country where talent is prized and looked up to, instead of being merely tolerated and looked down upon. It is not, therefore, extraordinary if we find him moving in the best society, and having his entertainments attended by the *élite* of the residents or visitors in the gay city of Paris.

On her return home to her splendid apartments in the Rue Monthabor, Laura was immediately waited upon by her lady's-maid; and while the mistress was changing her attire in preparation for dinner, the dependant explained the means by which she had induced Charles Hatfield and the two Italian officers in the suite of the Grand Duke to repair to the Champs Elysées in company, and at the hour specified by Laura.

"When you first mentioned your desire to me this morning, *mademoiselle*," began Rosalie, "I must confess that I was somewhat embarrassed how to accomplish the scheme; although I did not despair. But when I saw the paragraph in the paper, and ascertained the hotel at which the Grand Duke and his suite had taken up their temporary abode, I suddenly remembered that a day or two ago I met a young woman who had formerly been my fellow-servant, and that she was now filling a situation in that very hotel. This circumstance inspired me with a hope of success; and we Frenchwomen look upon an intrigue as being as good as carried successfully out, when it affords a hope to encourage us. Therefore did I promise you so confidently;

and I lost no time in proceeding to the hotel. I soon found my friend, who is a chamber-maid there; and I told her just sufficient—without, however, mentioning your name or even alluding to you, *mademoiselle*—to induce her to afford me her assistance. Some of the officers of the Grand Duke's suite were lounging in the court-yard of the hotel at the time; and my friend pointed them out to me one by one, naming each as she proceeded. I resolved to choose the two youngest and handsomest to be Mr. Charles Hatfield's companions, *mademoiselle*; because," continued Rosalie, with an arch smile, "I tolerably well understood the entire nature of the project which you had in contemplation."

"You are marvellously sharp-witted and keensighted, Rosalie," said Laura, laughing good-humouredly. "But pray proceed. What step did you adopt next, after having thus passed the Grand Duke's suite in a review of which they were however unconscious?"

"I must confess, *mademoiselle*," resumed Rosalie, "that I was somewhat puzzled how to act. But suddenly an idea struck me; and, however ridiculous the plan may now appear to you, your own lips can proclaim whether it succeeded or not. In fact, I calculated upon the romantic disposition which the Italians are known to possess; and I also reflected that as Mr. Charles Hatfield, whom I likewise saw at the hotel (though he saw not me) appeared pensive and thoughtful, he would embark in any adventure that promised to wean his thoughts from their melancholy mood, and that offered some excitement of a novel character. I accordingly penned a note, addressed to Mr. Charles Hatfield, Captain Barthelma, and Lieutenant Di Ponta—"

"What is the name of the taller and handsomer of the two officers who accompanied Charles?" asked Laura, with a slight kindling of sensual feeling as she recalled to mind the pleasing features of the Italian who had picked up her parasol, and with whom she had exchanged the few complimentary observations already recorded.

"That one is Captain Barthelma," answered Rosalie.

"Proceed," said Laura. "You were telling me that you penned a note—"

"To the three gentlemen collectively," added the lady's-maid;—"and, as nearly as I can remember, the contents ran thus:—'To Mr. Charles Hatfield, Captain Barthelma, and Lieutenant Di Ponta, an unhappy Spanish refugee ventures to address himself, having certain excellent reasons for being well aware that they will not refuse to listen to his sad tale, and interest themselves in his behalf. But as he is an object of suspicion to the French government, he dares not make his appearance at the hotel where a prince, who is known to be the redresser of wrongs, has taken up his abode. He will therefore walk this afternoon, from four to five, on the right hand of the central avenue of the Champs Elysées; and if the three gentlemen to whom he now addresses his humble but earnest supplication, will be at the place and time appointed, the unhappy writer of this petition will make himself known to them—will explain his business frankly—and will indicate the means by which he can be restored to wealth and happiness. Those means consist in one word which it will be for His Sovereign Highness the Grand Duke to speak, and which can only be spoken at the insti-

gation of the three gentlemen to whom this letter is addressed."

"Upon my word, I give you credit for your stratagem!" exclaimed Laura, laughing heartily. "I have no doubt that Charles sees through it now: but he will not dare to give any explanations to his friends," she added, in a musing tone. "They will imagine that they have been duped by some humorous person—and he will affect to fall into the same way of thinking."

"Or else the two Italian gentlemen will suppose that the poor refugee was prevented, by some misadventure, from keeping the appointment," observed Rosalie, now giving way to her mirth to such a degree that the tears came into her eyes.

"Well—make an end of your story," said Laura, who had nearly completed her toilette; for, although she expected no one that evening, she nevertheless made it a rule to dress herself with the utmost care in case of a visit on the part of any of those persons whose acquaintance she had recently formed.

"I have little more to tell you, *mademoiselle*," responded Rosalie. "My friend, the chambermaid, left the note, which was duly sealed and properly addressed to the three gentlemen, upon the table of Captain Barthelma's private apartment; and soon afterwards that officer went to his room. I waited at the hotel in the hope of ascertaining the effect that the *billet* would produce; and in a short time the captain returned in haste to his companions, who were still lounging in the court-yard—some of them giving directions to their grooms, and others smoking cigars. From the window of my friend's chamber, I beheld Captain Barthelma draw Mr. Charles Hatfield and Lieutenant Di Ponta aside, and show them the letter. They evidently perused it with great attention; and I felt assured by their manner that they treated the affair seriously. I now requested my friend to hurry down stairs, and traverse the yard as if in pursuance of her avocations—but to pass as near the little group as possible, and endeavour to catch any remarks that they might be exchanging at the moment. This she did—and she heard quite enough to convince her that the appointment would be kept. I then retraced my way homeward, and was happy in being able to give you the assurance, *mademoiselle*, that your wishes would be fully gratified so far as the result depended upon me."

"You are a good girl, Rosalie," said Laura; "and I shall not be unmindful of the service you have thus rendered me. But I now require your aid in another matter—"

"Speak, my dear lady: I am entirely at your disposal," observed the dependant, who, in proportion as she obtained a farther insight into the character of her mistress, felt the more certain of reaping a fine harvest of rewards, bribes, and hush-money.

"There is in Paris at this moment an English nobleman concerning whom I am desirous that you should obtain as much information as you can possibly glean, without creating any suspicion or in any way compromising me. I allude to the Marquis of Delmour," continued Laura: "but I know not where he is residing; nor can I offer the least suggestion to guide you in instituting your inquiries."

"Leave all that to me, *mademoiselle*," said Rosalie.

"There is no time to be lost," observed Laura

"this evening, or in the course of to-morrow, must I have the information which I seek."

"I am not in the habit of letting the grass grow beneath my feet," replied the French dependant, with an arch smile. "The moment you have sat down to dinner, *mademoiselle*, I will sally forth; and should I not return until a somewhat late hour—"

"No matter," interrupted Laura: "I shall know that you are employed in my interests. Unless, indeed," she added, laughing, "you possess a lover whose company may prove more agreeable to you than the task with which I have entrusted you."

"I have no lover in Paris—at present, *mademoiselle*," observed Rosalie.

"Then you admit that you have had a lover in your life-time?" said Laura.

"Oh! certainly, *mademoiselle*," exclaimed the pretty Frenchwoman: "and—to speak candidly—I could not without some trouble reckon the number of those who have proclaimed themselves my admirers."

"The name of your lovers is Legion, then?" cried Laura, again laughing: but it was the natural sensuality of her disposition which impelled her thus to interrogate her servant;—for a licentious woman experiences a voluptuous enjoyment in learning that another is as amorously inclined or as downright abandoned as herself. And now that Laura's spite against Charles Hatfield was for the time appeased, and she had leisure to ponder upon the handsome countenance and elegant figure of Captain Barthelma, her imagination was becoming inflamed, and wanton ideas and aspirations rose up in her brain.

"Oh! *mademoiselle*," exclaimed Rosalie, with an archness of expression that made her countenance particularly interesting at the moment; "you must think me very vain and very silly for having made the remark which fell so inconsiderately from my lips!"

"Not at all," observed Laura: "you are pretty enough to have captivated many hearts. And now tell me, my dear girl—have you passed through such an ordeal without leaving your virtue behind? Be frank and candid: I wish to know you thoroughly, that I may determine how far I can trust you."

"I dare say, *mademoiselle*, that you can form a tolerably accurate guess in that respect," said Rosalie, in a low tone and with a blushing countenance. "Were I to tell you that I am pure and chaste, you would not believe me, *mademoiselle*—and—and, you would be right."

"Suppose, then, that you had suddenly conceived a great fancy for a very handsome young man, Rosalie?" said Laura, her bosom heaving voluptuously as she gradually approached the aim and object of the present conversation.

"I should take care to let him perceive that if he chose to solicit, it would not be in vain," answered Rosalie, who already comprehended that her mistress was not giving the discourse this turn without some definite end in view.

"And you would be deeply grateful," continued Laura, in a low but significant tone, "to any friend who might assist you in the management of the intrigue?"

"Decidedly, *mademoiselle*," replied the Frenchwoman: "the more so that I myself should delight in rendering my aid when and where the services

of so humble a being as I am could prove available."

"Those services may be made available this very evening," said Laura, a voluptuous glow spreading over her fine countenance, while her eyes became soft and melting in expression. "You must aid me, Rosalie, in gratifying an ardent longing which has sprung up within my bosom during the last few minutes, and which I may vainly struggle to subdue. But the intrigue requires so much delicate management—"

"I can anticipate all you would say, *mademoiselle*," interrupted Rosalie: then, in a significant tone, she added, "Captain Barthelma is decidedly one of the handsomest men I ever saw in my life."

"You have conjectured rightly," said Laura; "you have penetrated my thoughts! Can you—will you serve me in the gratification of this caprice of mine? But, remember—I must not be compromised in respect to a living soul save Barthelma and yourself."

"You know, *mademoiselle*, that you can trust to my fidelity, my sagacity, and my prudence," said Rosalie. "At what hour shall the handsome Italian visit you?"

"At nine—this evening," answered Laura: then referring to her watch, she added, "It is already six—and you have plenty of work upon your hands!"

"I will neglect nothing," observed the lady's-maid, in a tone of confidence. "Would it not be prudent to send the cook out of the way for the evening? For as the men-servants are on board-wages and sleep elsewhere, and the cook is therefore the only dependant who could possibly observe your proceedings, *mademoiselle*—"

"I leave all this to you, Rosalie," interrupted Laura;—"and now we have nothing more to say to each other for the present. Order the dinner to be served up at once—and then must you hasten to fulfil the commissions with which you are charged."

Having thus given her parting instructions, Laura repaired to the dining-room, where an elegant repast was speedily spread upon the table; and a glass of sparkling champagne soon enhanced the brilliancy of the voluptuous woman's eyes, and heightened the rich glow that suffused her countenance.

When the meal was over, a choice dessert was served up; and Laura was now left alone.

She was almost sorry that she had gone so far in respect to the intrigue which was to bring the handsome Castelician to her arms: she had admitted Rosalie too deeply into her confidence—placed herself too completely in the power of her dependant. Even while she was conversing with the wily Frenchwoman, she perceived and felt all this;—but her sensuality triumphed over her prudence—her lascivious temperament carried her on with a force which she could not resist, much less subdue.

"And, after all," she now reasoned to herself, "wherefore should I not follow my inclinations in this respect? I am free to act according to the impulse of my passions and the prompting of my desires. The night that I passed with Charles—that one night of love and bliss—has revived those ardent longings, those burning thoughts that demand gratification. Besides, Rosalie will be trustworthy so long as she is well paid; and I shall take care to keep her purse well filled. Sooner or later she must have obtained a complete insight into my character: why not, then, at once as well as hereafter? And the more firmly I bind her to my inter-

ests, the less shall I need the services of my crafty, selfish old mother. Would that I could manage my affairs and execute my plans without my parent's aid altogether! And who knows but that even this consummation may be reached? Something tells me that the Marquis of Delmour and I shall yet be more intimately acquainted. He is old—but that is of little consequence. Wealth and a proud position are my aims—and I care not by what means they are acquired. Oh! the happiness of possessing such beauty as that wherewith I am endowed,—a beauty which can never fail to crown me with triumph in all my schemes—in all my projects!"

She now regarded her watch, and discovered that it was eight o'clock.

"In another hour he will be here," she thought within herself; and her bosom heaved voluptuously. "Yes—in another hour that handsome Italian will be in my presence—at least, if Rosalie fulfil her task with her wonted sagacity and prudence. What will he think of me? Oh! let him entertain any opinion that he may: I will bind him to secrecy by the most solemn oaths—and I read enough in his countenance to convince me that he is a man of honour!"

In this strain did the lovely but wanton creature pursue her reflections, until it was nearly nine o'clock.

She then rose from her seat, and repaired to the kitchen, which was on the same floor as her suite of apartments. The cook was not there; and Laura was consequently satisfied that Rosalie had not forgotten the precaution herself had suggested.

The syren now proceeded to the drawing-room, where with her own fair hands she arranged wine, fruits, and cakes upon the table. She then drew the curtains over the window, lighted the wax candles upon the mantel, and scattered drops of delicious perfume upon the carpet and the drapery.

Scarcely were these preparations completed, when the bell of the outer door of the suite rang as if pulled by a somewhat impatient hand; and Laura hastened to answer the summons.

She opened the door—and Captain Barthelma, the handsome Castelician, appeared upon the threshold.

"Is it possible that this can be true?" he exclaimed, his joy amounting to a delirious excitement as his eyes fell upon the heroine of the afternoon's adventure in the Champs Elysées.

Laura smiled archly as she placed her finger upon her lip to impose silence, at least until he should have entered her abode; and, having closed the door carefully, she conducted him into the drawing-room.

CHAPTER CLXIV.

LAURA'S AMOUR.

SEATING herself upon the sofa, Laura motioned the Italian to place himself by her side—an invitation which he obeyed with a species of enthusiastic alacrity. But all the time he was unable to take his eyes off her—as if he still doubted whether it were indeed a fact that his good fortune had conducted him into the presence of her whose image had never once been absent from his mind since he first beheld her that afternoon in the Champs Elysées.

"Is it possible?" he again ejaculated, after a few

minutes' silence. "The young woman promised me that if I were discreet, I might expect the happiness of meeting you—yes, *you*, sweetest lady—again; but I confess that I doubted her—and I came that I might not throw away a chance of felicity, rather than in the sanguine hope of attaining it."

"And, when you have leisure for reflection" said Laura, casting down her eyes and blushing, "you will despise me for my imprudence—my indelicacy of conduct in thus sending to invite a stranger to visit me."

"Adorable woman!" exclaimed the impassioned Italian; "I shall think of you with gratitude—with devotion—with love,—and never lightly. Oh! be assured of *that*!"—and, seizing her hand, he conveyed it to his lips, and covered it with kisses.

"Nevertheless, you must be surprised at my boldness in directing my servant to seek you, and to make this appointment with you," pursued Laura, her bosom heaving so as almost to burst from its confinement, as she felt the warm mouth of the Castelicican glued to the hand which she did not attempt to withdraw.

"I am only surprised at my own happiness," observed the young officer. "Sweetest Laura—for I now know your name—tell me how I have thus been deemed worthy of a favour of which a prince might envy me the enjoyment!"

"An accident threw us together for a few minutes this afternoon," said Laura; "and I was struck by your personal appearance—your manners—your conversation—"

"And, oh! how profoundly was I impressed by the magic of your beauty, Laura!" interrupted the ardent Italian; "how earnestly I longed to hear once more the music of that melodious voice—to look again into the depths of those magnificent eyes—to contemplate that glorious countenance—that admirable form;—and now—oh! now the desire is realised—and no human language has words powerful enough to convey to you an idea of the happiness which I experience at this moment!"

As he thus spoke he threw his arms around her waist, and drew her towards him.

"Charming creature!" he exclaimed, after a few moments' pause, during which he gazed upon her with a rapture which can only be conceived and not explained: "how can I make thee comprehend the extent of my love—my adoration—my worship? I have travelled much—have seen beauties of all climes and of all varieties of loveliness;—but never did mine eyes settle upon one so transcendently charming as thou! When I parted from thee this afternoon in the Champs Elysées, it was as if I were tearing myself away from some one whom I had loved all my life, and whom I was never to see again. I was a second Adam, expelled from another Eden! And now—now, I behold thee once more—I am seated in thy presence—thou smilest upon me—oh! it is heaven—it is heaven!"—and, as if in a transport of fury—so impassioned was his soul—he drew her still closer towards him, and literally seizing her head with both his hands, glued his lips to hers—sucking in her very breath.

Intoxicated with sensual happiness, Laura offered no resistance to the ardour of the handsome young man; but ere she completely yielded herself up to him, she remembered that something was due to prudence as well as to the delights of love.

Accordingly, withdrawing herself from his embrace, though still permitting his arm to encircle

her waist, she said, "I can refuse you nothing; but first swear, by all you deem most sacred, that you will never betray me!"

"Never—never!" ejaculated Barthelma; "I take God to witness that my lips shall never breathe a word injurious to your honour! On the contrary," he cried, in a tone of deep sincerity, "should I ever hear a man speak lightly of you, I will provoke him to a duel that shall terminate only in the death of one—if not both; and should a woman dare to mention your name irreverently, I will even fabricate a tale injurious to *her* honour, that I may avenge *you*!"

"Thanks—a thousand thanks, my generous friend!" murmured Laura, one of her white hands playing with the long, dark, curling hair of the Castelicican. "But may you not—in an unguarded moment—when carousing, perhaps, with your brother-officers,—may you not inadvertently allude to the adventure which happened to you in Paris, and then be unconsciously drawn out—under the influence of wine—to make revelations which will prove the ruin—the utter ruin—of the weak, but confiding woman who trusts so much to your honour this night?"

"May my tongue blister—may lightnings strike me—may I be cast down a corpse at the feet of those to whom I ever open my lips to speak irreverently or ungratefully of thee!" exclaimed the Italian, with a terrible energy. "No—my adored Laura! you have not the slightest ground for apprehensions of that nature. I am a man of honour—and I would rather shed the last drop of my blood to serve thee, than raise a finger to harm thee. Beautiful creature—adorable woman! who that possesses a spark of human feeling, could do aught to bring a tear into thine eye or chase away the smile from thy lips? I am thy slave, Laura—and I rejoice in wearing the chains which thy magic loveliness has cast around me!"

In this impassioned strain did the Italian pour forth his adoration; and, as Laura gazed upon him with eyes swimming in very wantonness, she thought that he was far more handsome than she had fancied him to be in the afternoon, or even when he had first appeared before her that evening.

He, too, on his part, found the syren a thousand times more witching—more beautiful—more attractive than she had seemed in her carriage; and yet even then he had been ready to fall down and worship her. Now he beheld her in a light evening toilette—with naked neck and naked arms,—no scarf—not even the most transparent gauze veiling her shoulders of alabaster whiteness,—and with her hair dressed in massive curls, instead of hyperion ringlets;—now, too, he could perceive, by the undulations of her attire, that her limbs were turned with a symmetry that was elegant and yet robust—admirable in shape, though full in their proportions.

"I thank you most sincerely for the assurances of secrecy which you have given me," said Laura, in the sweetest, most melting cadence of her delicious voice; "likewise for the chivalrous professions with which you have coupled them. You declare yourself to be my slave," she added; "but it will be for this night only!"

And she hid her countenance on his breast, as if ashamed of the invitation which her words implied—an invitation that welcomed him at her abode until the morning!

"In one sense I understand you, my charmer."

he said, kissing her beauteous head as it lay reclining on his bosom; "and that alone ought to be happiness sufficient for me! But I am greedy—I am covetous; and I demand more! Listen, adored Laura—grant me your patience for a few minutes."

She raised her head, and gazed tenderly up into his animated countenance as he spoke.

"I am not a rich man," he continued; "but I possess a competency—nay, a handsome competency; and I care not how soon I abandon the service of even so good and excellent a prince as his Sovereign Highness—in order to devote myself wholly and solely to you. I know not who you are—I only know that you are the loveliest creature on the face of God's earth, and that your name is Laura Mortimer. Neither do I seek to know more. But I am ready and anxious to join my fortunes with yours—to marry you, if you will accept me as your husband,—or to become your slave—your menial! Tell me not, then, that we must part to-morrow: oh! let me remain with you, my charming Laura, until death shall separate us!"

"It cannot be, my handsome Barthelma!" murmured Laura. "But let me call you by your Christian name—"

"Lorenzo," said the Castalcicalan.

"You are, then, my handsome Lorenzo for this night—and for this night only," continued Laura, throwing her warm, plump, exquisitely modelled arms about his neck, and pressing her lips to his glowing cheek.

"Cruel—cruel Laura!" he exclaimed, returning the ardent caress.

"Oh! would that circumstances permitted—"

"No circumstances can separate us, if you should decide that we are to remain together," interrupted the Castalcicalan, in an impassioned tone.

"Alas! you know not—"

"If you are already a wife, I will kill your husband," cried Lorenzo, again speaking with vehement abruptness: "if you are engaged to wed one whom you dislike, I will dare him to wrest you from my arms;—and if you have relations—father or brothers—whom you imagine yourself bound to consult, you may rest well assured that in preferring my love to that of kith and kin you will be receiving the purest gold in exchange for comparative dross."

"Dear Lorenzo, I must seal your eloquent lips with kisses," said Laura, with an arch playfulness that was also full of wantonness: "yes—I must seal those red, moist lips," she murmured, after having pressed her mouth to his; "or you will persuade me to give an affirmative answer to your endearing solicitations—and that would only be to record a promise to-night which I must break to-morrow."

"Are you, then, my angel, the mistress of some man on whose wealth you are dependent, or in whose power circumstances have placed you?" demanded the impassioned Italian, with more fervid frankness than considerate delicacy.

"I am not—I never was—and I never shall be a pensioned mistress, Lorenzo!" answered Laura, her manner becoming suddenly haughty.

"Pardon me—Oh! I implore you to pardon me, my angel!" exclaimed the young officer, straining her to his chest. "Not for worlds would I offend you—not even to save my soul from perdition would I wrong you by word or deed! Tell me, Laura—tell me—am I forgiven?"

She raised her countenance towards his own, and when their lips met she sealed his pardon with a long, burning kiss.

"And now," she said, "do not ask me again to do that which is impossible. I cannot marry you, although I am not married—I cannot be your mistress, although I am not the mistress of another—I cannot hold out any hope to you, although I am pledged to none other."

"You are as enigmatical as you are charming—you are as mysterious as you are beautiful!" exclaimed Lorenzo, contemplating his fair companion with the most enthusiastic rapture.

"And it is not now for you to mar the pleasure which we enjoy in each other's society, by seeking to render me less enigmatical or less mysterious," observed the syren. "At the same time I cannot be otherwise than flattered by the proposals you have made to me, and the generous manner in which you have expressed yourself in my behalf. Come—let us drink a glass of champagne to enhance the happiness of the moment, and drown careful reflections."

"Be it so, my charmer," said Lorenzo: "and if I no more torment you with my entreaties—if I resolve to content myself with the amount of bliss which you have promised me,—nevertheless, my dearest—ever dearest Laura, I shall take leave of you to-morrow morning with the fervent hope that we shall shortly meet again. You told me this afternoon that you proposed to visit Montoni in the course of the ensuing autumn—"

"Yes—I have no doubt that I shall be enabled to fulfil that promise," interrupted Laura, by way of changing the topic of discourse. "And now that you have given me to understand that you will not revive the useless but flattering, and, in some sense, agreeable proposals you made me just now, let us think only of the enjoyment of the present."

"It shall be as you say, my angel," returned Lorenzo; and he forthwith filled a glass with sparkling champagne, which he handed to his fair companion.

She quaffed it at a draught, and a flood of light seemed to suffuse her entire countenance, and render her eyes brilliant as diamonds: her lips, too, moist with the generous juice, acquired a deeper red—and her bosom panted with amorous longings.

Lorenzo beheld the effects of the rich fluid, and hastened to fill the glass again: then, ere he drained it of its contents, he studiously placed to his lips the side which Laura's mouth had touched.

"You had two friends with you this afternoon in the Champs Elysées?" said the syren, interrogatively, when they were once more seated, half-embraced in each other's arms, upon the sofa.

"Yes: one was a fellow-countryman of mine—the other a native of your land, my beloved," answered Lorenzo. "But I must tell you the singular adventure that occurred to us: and, indeed," he added, with a smile, "I am deeply indebted to a certain anonymous correspondent—for had it not been through him, I should not have this day visited the scene where I was fortunate enough to encounter you."

"A singular adventure!" exclaimed Laura, with an admirable affectation of the most ingenuous curiosity.

"Judge for yourself, my angel," replied Lorenzo: then, taking Rosalie's letter from his pocket, he

handed it to Laura, who, consuming with strong desires though she were, could scarcely suppress a laugh as she perused the *billet*, with the contents of which she was already so well acquainted.

"And did you see the poor man who addressed you and your friends in this wild, romantic style?" she asked, restoring him the note.

"He did not make his appearance," responded Barthelma. "But even if that letter were the production of some mischievous wag, or of a crazy person, I could not possibly feel otherwise than rejoiced at having been made the dupe of either a humourist or a madman: for, as I just now observed, the anonymous letter led to my meeting with you."

And, as he spoke, he smoothed down her glossy, luxuriant hair with his open palm.

"But doubtless your two companions found more difficulty in consoling themselves for the disappointment?" said Laura.

"Faith! dear lady," exclaimed Lorenzo, "they spoke but little on the subject: for, to tell you the truth, your beauty had not failed to produce a very sensible effect on them as well as upon myself."

"Flatterer!" cried Laura, playfully caressing the handsome Italian.

"Oh! you know that you are lovely—transcendently lovely!" he exclaimed, in an ardent tone; "and you can well believe me when I assure you that my two friends escaped not the magic influence of your charms. But how different were the effects thus produced! Di Ponta—that is the name of my fellow-countryman—was enthusiastic and rapturous in your praise; whereas Charles Hatfield—the Englishman—became gloomy, morose, and sullen——"

"A singular effect for the good looks of a woman to produce!" cried Laura, laughing—while her heart beat with the joy of a proud triumph.

"Such, nevertheless, was the case in this instance, my angel," said Lorenzo. "I do firmly believe that Hatfield was jealous of me in being the happy mortal who perceived the loss of your parasol, and had the honour of restoring it;—yes—jealous, dear lady, because that happy accident introduced me to your notice, and privileged me to address you."

"Your English friend must be a very weak-minded young man," observed Laura; "and I am truly delighted that it was not he whose acquaintance I was destined to make this day."

"Nevertheless, he is very handsome," said Lorenzo, gazing upon the syren with a playful affectation of jealousy.

"Not so handsome as you, my Barthelma," replied Laura, with simulated enthusiasm; and, in order to dispel the partial coldness which a digression from amorous topics had allowed to creep over her, she cast her arms around Lorenzo's neck and fastened her lips to his.

Then the blood began once more to circulate like lightning in her veins,—and her voluptuous bosom panting against the young Italian's chest.

Here shall we leave the amorous pair; for, after a little tender dalliance and another glass of the exciting juice of Epernay, they retired to the chamber whose portal we must not pass to follow them.

* * * * *

At eight o'clock in the morning Lorenzo Barthelma took his departure; and shortly afterwards Rosalie entered Laura's room.

The Frenchwoman, who was as discreet as she was an adept at intrigue, wore the usual calm and respectful expression of countenance; and not even by a sly smile nor an arch look did she appear as if she devoted a thought to the manner in which her mistress had passed the night.

"Did the captain depart unperceived?" inquired Laura, who, although she had given no instructions to that effect, was nevertheless well assured that her intelligent abigail had superintended the egress of the handsome Italian.

"Entirely unobserved, *mademoiselle*," was the answer. "I amused the porter and his wife in their lodge for a few minutes while Captain Barthelma slipped out into the street. Three persons alone are acquainted with last night's adventure,—you, the captain, and myself."

"Good!" exclaimed Laura; then, drawing aside the curtain of the bed in which she was voluptuously pillowed, she said, "And now, my dear Rosalie, give me an account of your proceedings relative to the Marquis of Delmour."

"I have learnt but a few facts, *mademoiselle*," was the reply: "those, however, are of some importance. He is enormously rich—very generous—bears an excellent character——"

"Is he married?" demanded Laura, hastily.

"Yes: but he has been living apart from his wife for many years;—and respecting the cause of their separation, there is a great mystery which not even his best friends can penetrate, and into which, therefore, a casual inquirer like myself could not obtain the least insight."

"And this is all you could ascertain concerning him?" said Laura, interrogatively. "Did you not think of asking if he had any family by his wife?"

"I did not forget to make that inquiry, *mademoiselle*," answered Rosalie; "and I was assured that his lordship is childless."

"You are a good and faithful creature," observed Laura; "and your services will prove invaluable to me. That purse which lies on the toilette-table, contains no insignificant sum in gold. It is yours—a recompense for the work of yesterday. But as you now know more of me than you did before, and as in a few short hours I permitted you to obtain a deeper reading of my secret soul than you could possibly have acquired, had I shut myself up in a studied reserve, it is as well that you should understand me thoroughly. I mean this, Rosalie—that I can be a good friend, or an implacable enemy——"

"I shall never provoke your enmity, *mademoiselle*," observed the abigail.

"I do not think you will, Rosalie," resumed Laura: "but, as I said ere now, it is as well that you should comprehend my character in all its details—in all its phases. You will benefit yourself by serving me faithfully: you would only injure yourself by playing me false. When once I have said upon this subject all that I mean to say, I shall not again refer to it: but the better we understand each other, the more permanent will be our connexion. Reckon, then, on my friendship so long as you deserve it;—deceive me, and I will risk my very life to be avenged."

"Oh! *mademoiselle*," exclaimed Rosalie, absolutely frightened by the vehemence with which her mistress spoke,—“have I done anything to render you suspicious of me?”

"On the contrary," said Laura, with a smile; "you have done all you could to serve me—and you

see that I have not forgotten to reward you. But within the last twelve or eighteen hours I have permitted you to read all the weaknesses of my soul—and now it is requisite that you should understand its strength: I have made you my confident—but I deemed it prudent to convince you that I know how to punish treachery. That is all, Rosalie: I have no more to say upon the subject;—and now, let me see your pretty face cheer up and wear a smile."

The Frenchwoman was reassured by these last words; and, finding that her mistress had only intended to give her a salutary warning, and not to upbraid her for any actual misconduct, she speedily recovered her wonted gaiety and good spirits.

CHAPTER CLXV.

LORD WILLIAM TREVELYAN.

THE scene changes to the residence of Lord William Trevelyan in Park Square.

It was evening, and the young nobleman was pacing up and down in an elegantly furnished parlour, which was lighted by means of a brilliant gas-jet enclosed in a pale red glass globe—so that the lustre which filled the room was of roseate hue. The curtains, sofas, and cushions of the chairs were of a rich crimson; and the paper on the walls was of a kindred colour and splendid pattern. In each corner of the apartment stood a marble jar, filled with flowers recently gathered, and rendering the atmosphere cool and fragrant.

Lord William was tall and handsome; his complexion was somewhat dark, giving him the appearance of a Spaniard rather than of an Englishman; and yet the ruddy hues of health were upon his cheeks. His hair was black as jet, silky as that of a woman, and parted above a brow high, intellectual, and expressive of a noble mind. His eyes were large and dark, and full of the fire of genius; and there was something peculiarly pleasing—almost winning in his smile.

In disposition Lord William was amiable—in manners unassuming; his character was unimpeachable—and his political opinions were of the most liberal tendency. His charity was extensive, but entirely unostentatious: his dependants revered him as a good master, and his acquaintances loved him as a sincere friend.

He was in his twenty-fourth year; and, until he had set eyes upon Agnes Vernon, he had never experienced the influence of the tender passion. But one day, while on a visit to a friend at Norwood, he was strolling alone in the vicinity, and accident led his footsteps towards the cottage, in the garden belonging to which he beheld the beautiful creature whose image had ever since filled his soul.

Truly had he said to Mrs. Mortimer that he adored the fair recluse of the cottage—that he worshipped the very ground upon which she trod: his love amounted almost to an idolatry;—and yet he had never exchanged a word—scarcely even a look, with the object of his affection!

It could be no world-contaminated heart that entertained such a passion as this—no selfish soul that could cherish such a pure and holy attachment.

But it was a generous—upright—noble-minded young man, who was now anxiously waiting the

arrival of the woman with whom he had made an appointment for the evening in question.

Were the English aristocracy to be judged generally by such nobles as the Earl of Ellingham and Lord William Trevelyan, the term of its existence would not now perhaps be within the range of prophecy.

But, as matters now stand,—as the aristocracy is corrupt, selfish, and cruel—self-sufficient and ignorant—proud and intolerant—unprincipled, profligate, and tyrannical,—it is not difficult to predict its speedy downfall.

Therefore is it that we boldly proclaim our conviction that Monarchy and Aristocracy will not exist ten years longer in enlightened England; but that a Republic will displace them!

The *hereditary principle*, either in Monarchy or Aristocracy, is the most detestable idea that ever entered the brains of knaves, or was adopted by fools.

In respect to Monarchy, we are gravely assured that the principle of hereditary succession guarantees a nation against the civil wars that may arise from the pretensions of numerous claimants to the supreme power. But the history of every monarchical country in the world gives the lie to this assertion. Crowns have been bones of contention from time immemorial, and will continue to be so until they be crushed altogether beneath the heel of Republicanism. Take the history of England, for instance—that England, where the hereditary principle is said to be admirable and efficacious beyond all question: thirty-three Kings or Queens and two minors have reigned in this country since the Conquest by the Norman ruffian—and during that period we have had eight civil wars and nineteen rebellions!

The LAWS OF GOD, moreover, bear testimony against Monarchy. What said the Prophet Samuel when the Jews insisted upon having a King? "I will call unto the Lord, and he shall send thunder and rain, that you may perceive and see that your wickedness is great which you have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking you a King. So Samuel called unto the Lord, and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day; and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel. And all the people said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not; for we have added unto our sins this evil, to ask a King."

Either the Bible is true or false. If true—as assuredly it is—then is the institution of Monarchy a positive crime, tolerated by an entire nation!

And no wonder that Heaven itself should protest against a system which is nothing more nor less than setting up an idol for the millions to worship,—an idol as useless as an Indian pagod, but often as terrible and slaughterous in its baleful influence as Juggernaut in its fatal progress.

Never did Satan contrive a scheme more certain of promoting idolatry than the raising up of Kings and Queens as rivals to the Majesty of Heaven;—for the root of Monarchy is in hell—the laws of God denounce the institution as a sin—and the history of the whole world proclaims that blood inevitably attends upon it!

All men were originally equal; and in no country therefore, could any privilege of birth give one family a right to monopolise the executive power for ever:



neither can one generation bind that which is as yet to come. The existing race of human beings has no property in the one unborn: we of the present day have no right to assume the power of enslaving posterity:—and, on the same principle, our ancestors had no right to enslave us. If those ancestors chose to make one set of laws for themselves, we can institute another code for our own government. But of course such a change as this can only be made by the representatives of the People; and in order that the people *may* have a fair representation, the following elements of a constitution become absolutely necessary:—

Universal Suffrage;
Vote by Ballot;
No Property Qualification
Paid Representatives;
Annual Parliaments; and
Equal Electoral Districts.

Give us these principles—accord us these institutions—and we will vouch for the happiness, prosperity, and tranquillity of the kingdom.

The French now stand at the head of the civilisation of Europe. They are on the same level as

the fine people of the United States of America, and England occupies an inferior grade in the scale.

Alas! that we should be compelled to speak thus of our native land: but the truth must be told!

As yet almost every country in Europe has demanded and obtained something of its rulers, in consequence of the French Revolution;—whereas England has as yet obtained nothing in the shape of Reform!

Oh! shame—shame! what has become of our national spirit?—are we all willing slaves, and shall we not agitate—morally, but energetically agitate—for our rights and liberties?

The aristocracy and the men in power treat the people's assemblies with ridicule, and denominate the working-classes, when so assembled, as “a mob.” They will not discriminate between honest politicians and the respectable working-classes on the one hand, and the ragamuffinry of society on the other. They confound us all together in the sweeping appellation of “*the mob!*”

The insensates! Do they not reflect that if ten or fifteen thousand persons meet for the purpose of

discussing some grand political question, some five or six hundred pickpockets and mischievous boys are certain to intrude themselves into the assemblage? Why—black sheep even find their way into the Houses of Parliament—aye, and into the very suite of Royalty itself.

But after recording all the above observations, we must once more declare that we do not recommend violence: we insist upon the necessity of a grand moral agitation—an agitation which shall pervade the entire country, as an ocean is roused by the storm into a mass of mighty waves. The people must assume an imposing attitude; and let the memorable words of Lafayette be repeated by every tongue:—“*For a nation to love liberty, it is sufficient that she knows it; and for a nation to be free, it is sufficient that she wills it.*”

And, oh! my fellow-countrymen, let not this glorious thesis be used in vain! By the misery and starvation which millions of ye endure—by the hopeless entombment to which the Poor Law Bastilles condemn ye, when work fails—by the denial of an honest recognition of the rights of labour, which is insolently persisted in—by the spectacle of your famished wives and little ones—by the naked walls of the wretched hovels in which the labouring population dwells—by the blinding toil of the poor seamstress—by the insults heaped on ye by a rapacious aristocracy and an intolerant clergy—by the right which a despicable oligarchy usurps to hold the reins of power—by the limited suffrage which leaves the millions unrepresented—by the oppressive weight of taxation laid upon the productive classes—by the sorrows which the hard-working operative endures throughout his virility, and the misery that attends upon his decrepitude—by the badge of pauperism that the sons and daughters of toil are compelled to wear in the accursed Union-houses,—by all your wrongs, we adjure ye not to remain at rest—not to endure the yoke which ye can cast off in a moment—not to stand still and gaze listlessly, while all the rest of the civilised world is in motion!

Returning from this digression to the thread of our narrative, we will suppose that Mrs. Mortimer has at length arrived at the house in Park Square, and that she is already seated with the young nobleman, who little suspected the infamous character of the woman whom he had admitted to his confidence.

“I have been looking forward with much impatience and anxiety to your coming,” said Lord William: “but even now that you are here, I know not in which manner you can assist me.”

“*Faint heart never won fair lady*, my lord,” returned the old woman; “and you must take courage. The maxim which I quoted is a good one.”

“I do not despair, madam,” said the young nobleman: “and yet I seem as if I were involved in a deep mist, through which I cannot even grope my way. Alone and unassisted, I cannot hope to obtain access to that charming creature; and, if assisted, I will do nothing that shall violate the respect due to one so pure of heart as I believe her to be.”

“I should have proposed to become the bearer of a letter from your lordship to Miss Vernon,” remarked Mrs. Mortimer, coldly: “but, perceiving beforehand that your scruples are over nice and your notions somewhat of the most fastidious, I really do not see how I can serve you.”

“I am afraid to write to her—she would perhaps be offended to an extent that might be irremediable,” exclaimed Lord William, a prey to the most cruel bewilderment.

“And yet your lordship once endeavoured to bribe the servant-girl to become the bearer of your amatory epistle,” said Mrs. Mortimer, in a tone of sarcasm—almost of disgust.

“Now you are offended with me,” cried the young nobleman. “It is true that I did pen a letter to Agnes—telling her how much I loved her and how honourable were my intentions—imploping her likewise to grant me a few moments’ interview, and to pardon the means that I thus adopted of accosting her, having no other mode of procuring an introduction. Such a letter I did indeed write,” continued Trevelyan: “but it was in a fit of despair—of madness—of insensate recklessness,—I know not how to explain myself! The servant refused to deliver that note—and my eyes were immediately opened to the impropriety of the proceeding which I had adopted.”

“And you therefore decline to entrust me, who am well acquainted with Agnes, to deliver a similar letter into her hand? Your lordship is wrong in thus refusing to be guided by me,” continued the crafty old woman. “Think you that with one so innocent, so artless as Agnes, I cannot prepare the way to render your letter acceptable—at least to prevent it from producing a sudden shock to her notions of maidenly propriety?”

“Much as I should be rejoiced could you accomplish that aim,” said Trevelyan, “I should be ten thousand times happier were you able to procure me an interview with her.”

“This is madness!” exclaimed the old woman. “Can I not more easily induce her to read a letter from a stranger, than to receive that stranger in person? Is not the letter the first and most natural step to the visit? Trust to me, my lord: I know the disposition of Agnes—I understand affairs of this nature—and I am also well aware that love blinds you to the ways of prudence.”

“Be it, then, as you propose,” said Lord William, after a long pause, during which he reflected profoundly. “I will write the letter this evening: will you call for it early to-morrow morning?”

“I will,” answered the old woman: “and in less than twenty-four hours I will undertake to bring you tidings calculated to encourage hope—or I am very much mistaken,” she added emphatically.

“You do not believe—you have no reason to suppose that the father of Agnes already destines her to become the bride of some person of his own choice?” asked Trevelyan, now for the first time shaping in words an idea that had haunted him for some days past. “Because,” he continued, speaking with the rapidity of excitement, “I cannot possibly comprehend wherefore he compels her to dwell in that strict seclusion.”

“I do not believe that you have any such cause for apprehension,” said Mrs. Mortimer, in a tone of confidence—as if she were well able to give too species of assurance which she so emphatically con-

veyed. "There is a mystery—a deep mystery attached to the fair recluse,—and what that mystery is, I am myself completely ignorant. But that the father of Agnes has no such intention as the one you imagined, and that Agnes herself has as yet never known the passion of love,—these are facts to which I do not hesitate to pledge myself most solemnly."

"Oh! then there is indeed room for hope!" exclaimed Lord William, his countenance brightening up and joy flashing in his eyes.

"A nobleman in your position—blessed with wealth and a handsome person—endowed with agreeable manners and a cultivated mind," said Mrs. Mortimer, "need not despair of winning the love and securing the hand of a maiden dwelling in utter obscurity and totally unacquainted with the world."

"I would rather that she should learn to love me for my own sake, madam," observed Lord William, in a serious tone, "than for any adventitious advantages of rank or social position that I may possess."

"Well, my lord—we shall see," said Mrs. Mortimer, rising to depart. "To-morrow morning I will call for the letter; and I shall proceed straight over to the cottage: in the afternoon, or evening, I will do myself the honour of waiting upon your lordship again."

"I shall expect you with impatience, madam," returned Trevelyan, as he politely hastened to open the door for her.

Mrs. Mortimer took her leave; and the young nobleman sat down to pen a letter to Agnes Vernon.

But this was not so easy a matter as he had anticipated. Sheet after sheet of paper did he spoil,—a hundred times did he commence—and as often did he throw aside his pen in despair. Now he fancied that his style was too bold—then he conceived it to be too tame and vague: now he imagined himself to be too complimentary in his language towards one possessing a mind so chaste and pure—then he felt assured that he was acting indiscreetly to write at all. In the course of an hour he was swayed by such an infinite variety of conflicting sentiments and impressions that he was almost inclined to throw up the task in despair.

At length, however, he made a beginning which pleased him; and his pen then ran fluently enough over the paper, until the letter was composed in the following manner:—

"Pardon a stranger who dares to address you, beautiful Miss Vernon, in a strain that might give you offence, were he not sincere in his language and honourable in his intentions:—pardon me, I implore you—and refuse not to read these few lines to the end! He who thus writes is the individual that you have observed occasionally in the vicinity of your dwelling; and you will perceive by the signature to this letter that he is not a man without ostensible guarantees for his social position. That his character is unimpeachable he can proudly declare; and that he will not address to you, Miss Vernon, a single word which he will fear to repeat in your father's presence, he solemnly declares.

"Let me, however, speak of myself in the first person again: let me assure you that your beauty has captivated my heart—and that, if anything were wanting to render me your slave, the description which the bearer of this letter has given me of your amiable qualities, would be more than sufficient. I am rich—and therefore I have no selfish motive in addressing you, even if you be rich also: but I would rather that it were otherwise with you, so that my present proceeding may appear to you the more disinterested. Had I any

means of obtaining an introduction to you, beautiful Miss Vernon, I should not have adopted a measure that gives me pain because I tremble lest it should wound or offend you. But mine is an honest—a sincere—and a devoted attachment; and I shall be happy indeed if you will permit me to open a correspondence with your father on the subject. Were he to honour me with a visit, I should be proud to receive him. But if, in the meantime, you seek to know more of me—if I might venture to solicit you to accord me an interview of only a few minutes, you cannot divine how fervently I should thank you—how delighted I should feel! Let this interview take place in the presence of Mrs. Mortimer, if you will: I have nothing to communicate to you that I should hesitate to say before your father or your friends. Oh! how can I convince you of my sincerity?—how can I testify my devotion?—how can I prove the extent of my love?

"I beseech you to reflect, Miss Vernon, that my happiness depends upon your reply. Am I guilty of an indiscretion in loving you? Love is a passion beyond mortal control! He who knows no other deity, deserves not blame for worshipping the sun, because it is glorious and bright; and my heart, which knows no other idol, adores you, because you are beautiful and good. Treat not my conduct, then, with anger: let not your pride be offended by the proceeding which I have adopted in order to make my sentiments known to you;—and scorn not the honest—the pure—the ardent affection which an honourable man dares to proffer you. I do not merit punishment because I love you;—and your silence would prove a punishment severe and undeserved indeed! Again, I conjure you to remember that the happiness of a fellow-creature depends upon you: your decision will either inspire me with the most joyous hope, or plunge me into the deepest despair. At the same time, beautiful Agnes,—(the words—those delightful words, 'beautiful Agnes,' are written now, and I cannot—will not erase them)—at the same time, I say, if your affections be already engaged—if a mortal more blest than myself have received the promise of your hand,—accept the assurance, sweet maiden, that never more shall you be molested by me—never again will I intrude myself upon your attention. For with my love is united the most profound respect; and not for worlds would I do aught to excite an angry feeling in your soul.

"Your ardent admirer and devoted friend,

"WILLIAM TREVELYAN."

With this letter the young nobleman was satisfied. He considered it to be sufficiently energetic, and at the same time respectful: he saw nothing in it against which the purest mind could take exceptions; and, in the sanguine confidence natural to his age, and to the honourable candour of his disposition, he already looked upon his aims as half accomplished—his aspirations as half gained.

Having sealed and addressed the letter, he placed it upon the mantel-piece ready for Mrs. Mortimer when she should call in the morning: then, fetching a portfolio from an inner room, he opened it, and from amongst several drawings in water-colours, selected one on which his gaze was immediately rivetted with deep and absorbing interest.

For that painting—executed by his own hand—was a portrait of Agnes Vernon; and even the most fastidious critic, if acquainted with the original, must have pronounced it to be a living likeness.

Yes: on that paper was delineated, with the most perfect accuracy, the fair countenance of the *Recluse of the Cottage*,—every feature—every lineament drawn with a fidelity to which only a first-rate artist, or an amateur whose pencil was guided by the finger of Love, could have possibly attained. There were the eyes of deep blackness and melting softness,—there was the high, intelligent forehead,—there was the raven hair, silken and glossy, and seeming to flow luxuriantly even in the very picture,—and there was the rich red mouth, wearing a smile such as mortals behold upon the lips of angels in

their dreams. How charming was the entire countenance!—how amiable—how heavenly the expression that it wore!

And no wonder that the likeness was so striking—so accurate—so faithful;—for the young nobleman had touched and retouched it until he had delineated on the paper the precise counterpart of the image that dwelt in his mind. Hours and hours had he devoted to that labour of love:—on each occasion when he returned home after contemplating, from behind the green barrier of the garden, the idol of his adoration, he addressed himself to the improvement of that portrait. At one time he had beheld the maiden to greater advantage than at another; and then he studied to convey to the card-board the last and most pleasing impression thus made upon his mind; until he produced a likeness so faithful that not another touch was required—no further improvement could be effected.

And, like Pygmalion with his Galatea, how Lord William Trevelyan worshipped that portrait! No—the simile is incorrect; because the sculptor learnt to adore the statue that was cold and passionless—whereas the young nobleman was blest with the conviction that there was a living original for the image he had so faithfully traced upon his paper,—and it was that living original whom he made the goddess of his thoughts.

The clock had struck ten, and Lord William was still bending over the portrait that lay upon the table, when a footman entered the room to announce that a lady who declined to give her name solicited an interview with the young nobleman.

Lord William, hastily closing the portfolio, desired that she might be immediately shown into his presence.

The domestic bowed and retired.

In a few minutes he returned, ushering in the unknown visitor, who wore a veil over her countenance: but the moment the footman had withdrawn, she raised the veil, and disclosed a face that was strikingly handsome, though pale and careworn. She was apparently about thirty-six or thirty-seven years of age—with dark hair, fine hazel eyes, and good teeth. Tall and well-formed, her figure, which was rather inclined to *embonpoint*, was set off to advantage by the tasteful—indeed elegant style of her dress; and in her deportment there was an air of distinction denoting the polished and well-bred lady.

Lord William received her with becoming courtesy, requested her to be seated, and then awaited an explanation of her business.

"Your lordship is doubtless surprised at receiving a visit at so unseasonable an hour, and on the part of a complete stranger," began the lady, in a pleasing though mournful tone of voice: "but I know not to whom else to address myself for the information I now seek—and if you cannot afford it to me, I shall be unhappy indeed."

"Madam," said Lord William, somewhat astonished at this mysterious opening of the conversation, "if it be in my power to serve you, I shall render that service cheerfully."

"You are well acquainted, I believe, my lord, with Sir Gilbert Heathcote?" observed the lady, somewhat abruptly, as she bowed her thanks for the assurance the young nobleman had given her.

"Sir Gilbert Heathcote, though much older than I, is an intimate friend of mine," observed Trevelyan.

"Do you know where he is—what has become

of him?" demanded the lady, in a still more anxious tone than before.

"I really do not, madam," was the reply.

"Merciful heavens!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands together in a paroxysm of sorrow.

"I have not seen him for this week past," continued Trevelyan. "But—are you ill, madam? Can I offer you anything?—shall I summon assistance?"

And, as he spoke, the nobleman rose from his seat and approached the bell-pull.

"No—no, my lord!" cried the lady. "Do not ring—do not call your servants! I shall be better presently. But pardon me if I could not control my feelings," she added, wiping the tears from her eyes.

The young nobleman, in spite of the adjuration to the contrary, hastened into the adjoining room and speedily returned with a decanter of spring water and a tumbler. He then filled the glass and presented it to his afflicted visitor, who thanked him for his delicate attention with a look expressive of gratitude—the words that she would have uttered being stifled in her throat.

Refreshed with the cooling beverage, she said, after a short pause, "My lord, have you the slightest conception where your friend Sir Gilbert Heathcote is? Did he intimate to you his intention to leave London? did he hint at the probability of his departure from England? Oh! I conjure you to tell me all you know: for—for—you cannot divine how much—how deeply I love him!"

Trevelyan was struck with astonishment at these last words,—words that were uttered in a tone of such convincing, such profound sincerity, that he could not for an instant question their import. And yet—though since the days of childhood Trevelyan had known Sir Gilbert Heathcote—he had never heard that the baronet was married: on the contrary, he had invariably understood him to be a single man. If this latter belief were the true one, then, was the lady now in his presence the mistress of his friend?—for assuredly she had not spoken with the confidence of a sister, but with the hesitation of one who reveals a fact that is in some way associated with shame.

The lady perceived what was passing in the mind of Trevelyan; and in a low but fully audible tone, she said, "My lord, circumstances compel me to reveal myself to you as your friend's mistress. Yes: though I love him more than ever wife could love—yet am I only his mistress,—for, alas! I am the wife of another! And now, my lord," she added, with deep feeling, "you may spurn me from you—you may command your lacquey to thrust me from your dwelling: but I implore you to give me tidings of Sir Gilbert!"

"Madam," exclaimed Trevelyan, the moment he could recover from the bewilderment into which this impassioned address plunged him, "not for worlds could I do or say aught to augment your affliction—much less to insult you. I declare to you most solemnly that I have neither heard nor seen anything of Sir Gilbert Heathcote for a week. I called at his chambers in the Albany the day before yesterday, and was simply informed that he was not at home. I left my card without thinking to make further inquiries—not suspecting that his absence had been for days, instead of hours."

"Oh! yes—upwards of a week has elapsed since I saw him," exclaimed the lady, with difficulty sub-

ding a fresh outburst of grief. "Each day have I been to the Albany—and still the answer is the same—'*He has not returned*.' No—he has not returned," she added, clasping her hands together; "and he has not written to me! O God! I fear that some fatal accident has befallen him!"

"Do not give way to such a distressing belief," cried Trevelyan, feeling deeply for the unfortunate woman, whose grief was so profound and so sincere. "Shall I make inquiries—immediate inquiries—concerning him? Perhaps I may learn more than a lady possibly can."

"Generous-hearted nobleman!" exclaimed the visitor; "how can I ever repay you for this kindness towards an utter stranger?"

"Remember also, madam," said Trevelyan, "that, apart from my readiness to serve you or any lady whom affliction has overtaken, I begin to experience some degree of anxiety on behalf of a gentleman who has ever shown a sincere friendship towards me. Not another minute will I delay the inquiries which, alike for your sake and his, I now deem it necessary to institute."

Thus speaking, the young nobleman rose from his chair.

"My lord," said the lady, rising also, and speaking in a tone indicative of deep emotion, "may I hope to receive a communication from you as early as possible? My suspense will be great—it is even now intolerable——"

And she burst into tears.

"Madam," interrupted the young nobleman, profoundly touched by her affliction, which was evidently most unfeigned, "you can either accompany me, or remain here until my return. Perhaps the latter will be the more desirable—at least if you can restrain your impatience, so natural under the circumstances, for a couple of hours. But perhaps," he added, an idea striking him,—"perhaps you live at some distance——"

"I am the occupant of a house in Kentish Town," said the lady; "and therefore my dwelling is not very far from your lordship's. If you see no impropriety in it—if there be no one here whom my presence would offend," she continued, speaking in a subdued and almost timid tone, "I would rather—oh! much rather wait until you return."

"By all means, madam," exclaimed the generous-hearted young noble. "Should you require anything during my absence, the servants will obey your summons; and they will receive my orders, ere I depart, to pay you every attention."

"I shall not trouble them, my lord," was the reply: "but I return you my deepest—sincerest thanks for the kind consideration with which you treat me."

Trevelyan bowed, and then quitted the room.

CHAPTER CXLVI.

A SKETCH OF TWO BROTHERS.—A MYSTERY.

THE nobleman's cab was got ready in a very few minutes; and while he is driving rapidly along towards Piccadilly, we will place on record some particulars respecting Sir Gilbert Heathcote.

The baronet was a man of about forty years of age, and of very handsome countenance, as well as of tall, commanding figure. He had never married; and report stated that a disappointment in love, experienced when he was very young, had induced him

to make a vow to the effect that, as he had lost the idol of his heart's devotion, he would never accompany another to the altar. Such was the rumour which had obtained currency at the time amongst his friends, and was even repeated at the period whereof we are writing, whenever astonishment was expressed that a man enjoying all the advantages of personal appearance and social position should not have sought to form a brilliant matrimonial alliance. For the baronet was not only very handsome, as remarked above, but he also possessed the superior attraction of four thousand a year. His habits were nevertheless inexpensive: he lived in chambers at the Albany, and had no country seat. Indeed, he seldom quitted London, and was altogether of quiet—even retired habits. He was fond of reading, and was also an admirer of the fine arts: he used often to observe that the only extravagance of which he was ever guilty, consisted in the purchase of a fine picture or of articles of *virtù*;—but these he seldom retained—giving them as presents to his friends or to museums. Not that he was whimsical or capricious, and grew tired to-day of what he had bought yesterday: but he was pleased at the thought of rescuing good paintings and real curiosities from the auction-room or from Wardour-street; and he was wont to observe that he experienced more delight in seeing them in the possession of friends who could appreciate their value, or in museums where their safety was ensured, than in having them left to the mercy of servants in his "bachelor apartments." The fact was, that his disposition was naturally generous; but this generosity was displayed in a particular fashion—and as he himself admired objects of *virtù*, he fancied that they must likewise prove the most welcome gifts he could bestow upon his friends.

Sir Gilbert had a brother, who was very unlike himself. James Heathcote was an attorney—grasping, greedy, avaricious, unprincipled—and therefore rich. He was only two years younger than Sir Gilbert; but close application to business, evil passions, and parsimonious habits had exercised such an influence upon his personal appearance, that he seemed ten years older. His hair was grey—that of Sir Gilbert was quite dark: his form was slightly bowed—that of the baronet was erect as a dart. James also was unmarried—but not through any disappointment in early life. Indeed, he possessed a heart that might be susceptible of desire, but could not possibly experience the pure feeling of love. He lived in a handsome house in Bedford-row, Holborn; and his apartments were elegantly furnished;—for he was wont to observe that persons who are anxious to get on in this world, must make a good appearance, and that a mean office frequently turns away a person who might prove an excellent client. But his aim was to amass money—his object was to increase his wealth, no matter how: still he had always contrived matters so cunningly, that no one could positively and unequivocally prove him to be a rogue.

With such a dissimilitude of character between the two brothers, it cannot be supposed that any extraordinary degree of intimacy existed on their part. Indeed, they seldom saw each other—although the more generous nature of Gilbert would have cheerfully maintained a more consistent and becoming feeling: but the cold, reserved, matter-of-fact disposition of James proved absolutely repulsive and forbidding in this respect. So great, in

fine, was the discrepancy between these men, that people were surprised when they learnt for the first time that the money-making, hard-hearted attorney was the brother of the urbane, amiable, and polished baronet.

These hasty outlines will afford the reader some idea of Sir Gilbert Heathcote on the one hand, and Mr. James Heathcote on the other. We shall see more of them both hereafter; and their characters will then become more fully developed. In the meantime we must return to Lord William Trevelyan, whom we left hastening in his cab, at half-past ten at night, towards the Albany.

On arriving at that celebrated establishment, the young nobleman instituted various inquiries concerning Sir Gilbert; but not the least particle of information of a satisfactory nature could he obtain. It appeared that the baronet had been absent for eight days, and that no communication had been received from him—neither had he given any previous intimation of his intended departure. His brother had been informed of this unaccountable absence; but it seemed that the attorney had taken no step to solve the mystery. This was the only fact which Lord William succeeded in gleanings in addition to the meagre knowledge he already possessed relative to the matter; and he returned homeward with a heavy heart, and experiencing strange misgivings in respect to his friend.

It was near midnight when he re-entered the room where he had left the lady. The moment he appeared on the threshold of the door, she rose from her seat and hastened forward to meet him, her looks revealing the intensity of the anxiety and the acuteness of the suspense which she experienced. But when she saw by his countenance, even before a word fell from his lips, that he had no good news to impart, a ghastly pallor overspread her face, and she would have fallen had he not supported her and led her back to her chair.

"I grieve to say, madam," he at length observed, "that I have learnt nothing more than what you already know—unless indeed it be the fact that a communication respecting Sir Gilbert's disappearance has been made to Mr. James Heathcote, and that he has treated the matter with unpardonable levity—if not with heartless indifference."

"I do not know that brother—I never saw him," said the lady, speaking in a broken voice: "but I have heard enough of his character to make me dread him."

"At the same time, madam," remarked Lord Trevelyan, in a tone of firm though gentle remonstrance, "there is not the slightest ground for suspicion against Mr. James Heathcote; and such an observation as that which a moment ago fell from your lips, might act most seriously to the prejudice of an innocent man. I likewise am unacquainted with Mr. Heathcote, otherwise than by name—"

"And your lordship is well aware that his reputation is not the most enviable in the world!" exclaimed the lady in an impassioned tone.

"I have never heard any definite charges against him, madam," said Trevelyan.

"No—not positive charges which may fix him with the perpetration of a special and particular deed of guilt," she cried, as if determined to level her suspicions against the attorney: "but your lordship has doubtless heard a thousand vague accusations—usury—extortion—grinding down the poor to the very dust—hurrying on law proceed-

ings with merciless haste—unrelentingly sweeping away the property of his victims—"

"All these charges I have certainly heard, madam," said Trevelyan; "but I will not admit that they warrant the darkest, blackest suspicion which one human being can possibly entertain towards another. Understand me, madam—I have no motive in defending James Heathcote, beyond the true English principle of never judging a person through the medium of prejudices. For your satisfaction I will call upon Mr. Heathcote to-morrow—I will speak to him relative to the mysterious disappearance of his brother—I will hear his replies—I will even watch his countenance and observe his manner as he speaks. And believe me, madam," proceeded the young nobleman, emphatically,—"believe me when I assure you that if there should transpire the least cause of suspicion—if there should appear ought to warrant the belief that James Heathcote could have possibly practised or instigated foul play in respect to his brother,—believe me, madam, I repeat, that I will pursue the investigation—I will leave no stone unturned—I will prosecute my inquiries until I shall have brought home that deep guilt to his door. But not for an instant—no, not for a single moment can I believe—"

"Act as you have said, my lord—and, depend upon it, you will find in the sequel that my opinions are not so unjust—so uncalled for—so reprehensible, as you now conceive them to be. But, oh!" exclaimed the lady, clasping her hands wildly together,—"it is terrible—terrible even for a moment to entertain the idea that he whom I love so devotedly may be no more!"

"Compose yourself, madam—tranquillise your feelings, I implore you!" cried Lord William Trevelyan. "We must not give way to despair—we must not harbour the dreadful thought that Sir Gilbert Heathcote has met with foul play, and that he ceases to exist. No—no: let us hope—"

"Oh! my lord, how can we hope in the face of such strange—such mysterious—such suspicious circumstances?" demanded the lady, with mingled grief and bitterness. "Even if he did not choose to acquaint his friends with his intended absence and its motives, he would not be equally reserved towards me. No—he would have seen me ere his departure—or he would at least have written. For you must now learn, my lord, that we have loved each other for upwards of twenty years," she continued, in a low and plaintive tone. "For twenty years and more have our hearts beat in unison,—and never—never was love so devoted as ours! Alas! mine has been a strange and romantic life; and the influence that has swayed all its incidents was that passion which the worldly-minded treat so lightly. For my father was a worldly-minded man; and, though he knew how fondly I loved and how ardently I was beloved,—though I knelt before him and conjured him by all he held most sacred, and by the spirit of my mother who died in my childhood, not to sacrifice me to the object of his choice, and tear me away from the object of mine,—nevertheless, he ridiculed my prayers—he made naught of my beseechings—and I was immolated upon the altar of a parent's sordid interest. Your lordship has perhaps already understood that the one whom I adored was Gilbert Heathcote. Never—never was love's tale told with more enchanting sweetness than by his lips: never—never did woman

cherish more devotedly than I that avowal of a sincere passion! At that time his personal beauty was sufficient to ensnare the heart of any maiden, though far less susceptible than mine;—and I loved him—loved him madly. But a wealthy noble had seen me; and my father beheld with joy the impression that I had been so unfortunate as to make upon that patrician's fancy. Moreover, at that period, my sire was suffering cruel pecuniary embarrassments; and the brilliant marriage which he hoped to accomplish for his daughter, appeared the only means of extricating himself from his difficulties. Thus the suit of the nobleman was encouraged by my father—and I was induced by the menaces, the prayers, and the specious reasoning which he employed by turns to move me,—I was induced, I say, to tolerate the visits of the peer, although heaven knows I never could encourage them. Not that his personal appearance was disagreeable—nor that I paused to reflect that his age was more than double my own: no—for he was handsome—very handsome; and, though his years were twice mine, yet he was but in the prime of life. Wherefore, then, did I receive his addresses with loathing?—wherefore did I implore my father to save me from an alliance which was so desirable and so brilliant in every worldly point of view? Oh! it was because my heart was irrevocably given to another—because Gilbert Heathcote possessed all my love!"

The lady paused, and wiped away the tears which so many varied reminiscences had wrung from her eyes,—while profound sobs convulsed her bosom.

Lord William Trevelyan felt the embarrassment and awkwardness of his position; for it was now past midnight—and he began to reflect that his servants might look suspiciously upon the fact of this protracted visit on the part of a lady who was still young enough, and certainly handsome enough to afford food for scandalous tongues. Not that Lord William was either a rigid saint or a stern anchorite in respect to the female sex: but, although unmarried, he behaved with the utmost circumspection, and would never have outraged decency so far as to make his own abode the place of an intrigue or gallant *rendezvous*. Moreover, the love which he entertained for Agnes Vernon had exercised such a purifying—such a chastening influence upon his soul, that he shrank from the idea of compromising himself by any real impropriety, or of becoming compromised by means of any indiscretion which scandal might think fit to attribute to him.

The lady was however too much absorbed in her own thoughts and emotions to mark how rapidly time was slipping away, or to reflect upon the imprudence of prolonging her visit. Her feelings were painfully excited, not only by the fears which she entertained on account of the absence of Sir Gilbert Heathcote—but likewise by the reminiscences which had been stirred up in her soul, and the outpouring of which to sympathetic ears seemed a necessary vent for a bosom so full of sorrow.

"Yes, my lord," she resumed, after a short pause, her voice still being characterised by a tone of the most touching melancholy; "my father forced me into that hated marriage—and though I gained rank and a proud position, yet hope and happiness appeared to have forsaken me for ever. But I cannot tell you all," she exclaimed, hastily, as if a sudden thought had struck her, warning her that she was about to be led by her feelings into revela-

tions of a nature which she would repent, or which would at least be unbecoming and injudicious.

"Madam," said Lord William, emphatically,—*"I do not seek your confidence—I do not even desire it: but you have to do with a man of honour, by whom everything you may impart, whether with premeditation or unguardedly, will be held as sacred."*

"I thank your lordship for this kind assurance," observed the lady. "Do not imagine that I wish to force you into becoming the depositary of my secrets, in order to establish a species of claim upon your friendship. No—my lord: I am not selfish—neither am I an intriguer,—only a most unhappy—a most unfortunate woman! But it is because you have manifested some little interest in me—because you have so generously promised to aid me in clearing up the mystery which surrounds the sudden disappearance of one so dear to me,—it is for these reasons, my lord, that I am anxious to explain so much of the circumstances of my connexion with him, as will convince you that nothing but the sincerest affection on my part could have placed me in a position which the world generally would regard with scorn. I have told your lordship how, loving Gilbert Heathcote, I was forced into a most inauspicious marriage with another: but the name of *that other* I need not mention. My father saw, when it was too late, that he had indeed sacrificed my happiness on the altar of his own selfishness and he died of remorse—of a broken heart! My husband—my noble husband—was kind and generous towards me: but I could not love him—and he knew it. Then he grew jealous—and other circumstances," she added, casting down her eyes and blushing deeply, "embittered our lives. At length—or, I should rather say, at the expiration of a few short years, I fled from him—fled from the husband who had been forced upon me—and sought refuge with the object of my heart's sole and undivided affection. From that moment I have dwelt under the protection of Sir Gilbert Heathcote,—dwelt in the strictest privacy—happy in the possession of his love—a love which, as well as my own, has known no diminution with the lapse of years. To one of your generous soul—of your enlightened mind, my position may not appear so degrading—so humiliating, as it would to one incapable of distinguishing between the heart's irresistible affection and a mere sensual depravity. Pardon me, my lord, for having thus obtruded this slight, and, I fear, rambling sketch, upon your notice: but I could not endure the conviction that I must appear in your eyes to be nothing more nor less than the pensioned mistress of your friend. The length of time that *his* love for me has endured, may be alone sufficient to persuade you that I am not to be confounded amidst the common mass of female degradation and immorality."

"Madam, I thank you for this explanation—and I comprehend all the delicacy and peculiarity of your position," said Lord William Trevelyan, rising from his seat, the lady herself having set the example—for it now struck her that she had remained until a very late hour.

"You will pardon me, my lord," she said, "for having thus occupied so much of your time. But I know you to be one of Sir Gilbert's best friends—indeed, the one of whom he was principally accustomed to speak, and whom he loved and relied upon the most. May I hope that you will favour me

with a communication, so soon as you shall have seen Mr. James Heathcote? Although, in virtue of my marriage, I bear a proud and a great name, yet for years and years have I been known only as Mrs. Sefton—and by that appellation must I be known to you."

The lady then mentioned her address in Kentish Town; and, extending her hand to the young nobleman, renewed her thanks for the kindness which he had shown her.

He offered to escort her to her home: but this she declined with a firmness, at the same time in such delicate terms, as to convince him that she would neither compromise herself, nor allow him to be compromised by a courtesy which he could not well have refrained from proposing, although he might not have been well pleased to carry it into effect.

He promised to call upon her as soon as he had anything important to communicate; and Mrs. Sefton then took her departure, Trevelyan ringing the bell in order that the servant might attend her to the door, so that there should be nothing clandestine nor stealthy in the appearance of the visit.

When Trevelyan was once more alone, he threw himself in an arm-chair, and gave way to his reflections—for the evening's adventure had, in all its details, furnished ample food for thought. In the first place, there was the strange—the unaccountable disappearance of Sir Gilbert Heathcote—a man to whom the young patrician was much attached, and whose friendship he valued highly. Then, in spite of the remonstrances which he had addressed to Mrs. Sefton, he found suspicions existing in his mind relative to James Heathcote—suspicions of a nature which he dared not attempt to define even in the secrecy of his own soul; but which nevertheless every moment grew stronger, vague though they were. Next, he pondered upon the particulars of the slight autobiographical sketch the lady had given him; and he dwelt with a yet unsubdued surprise on the fact that his friend Sir Gilbert had maintained, for so long a time and entirely unsuspected, a connexion that fully accounted for his bachelor-life. Lastly, Trevelyan meditated upon the course which he must adopt to discover the baronet's fate, unless he should speedily re-appear and relieve from their cruel suspense and uncertainty those who were interested in him.

The young nobleman felt not the slightest inclination to retire to rest, although it was now one o'clock in the morning. The adventures of the evening had excited and unsettled him;—but having pondered on the various topics above enumerated, his thoughts insensibly reverted to his beloved Agnes.

Suddenly his eyes caught the portfolio that he had left upon the table; and, opening it, he took forth the portrait of the Recluse of the Cottage. But, ah! why did he start?—what did he see?

Rising from his chair, he held the picture in such a manner that the light gave him a perfect view of it: and, sure enough—beyond all possibility of mistake—there was a mark upon the dress,—a spot, as if a drop of water—perhaps a tear—had fallen upon it.

What could this mean?—how could such an accident have happened?

Again and again he looked,—looked steadfastly—earnestly; and the longer he gazed, the more convinced did he become that his eyes did not deceive

him—that he saw aright—and that the stain or the spot was there!

Yet he had not noticed it when, after Mrs. Mortimer's departure, and previous to Mrs. Sefton's arrival, he had so long and so ardently contemplated that portrait. No: the mark was not there then; or else he—the lover, devouring the entire portrait,—he, the artist, scrutinising with satisfaction every minute detail of his own drawing,—oh! yes—he could not have failed to observe the slightest speck—the least, least spot that marred the general effect of that pleasing delineation!

Was it possible, then, that Mrs. Sefton had inspected the portfolio? Yes—such a supposition was natural enough. She was left alone in that room for nearly two hours; and, in spite of her sorrow, the time must have seemed so irksome to her as to induce her to have recourse to any means to while it away, if not to divert her thoughts into a less melancholy channel.

Yes—yes: he had divined the truth now, no doubt! At least such was his idea;—and then the tear—oh! it was easily accounted for. She was overwhelmed with grief at the mysterious and alarming absence of the man whom she loved; and she was weeping while she turned over the contents of the portfolio.

"Well—it is no matter," thought Trevelyan, as he arrived at these conclusions: "it would have been far worse had the tear fallen on the face of the portrait,—for I might labour for hours—nay, for days, without being enabled to catch and delineate so faithfully again that sweet expression of countenance which Agnes wears, and which I have succeeded in conveying to my paper. But the mark is upon the dress—and a single touch with the brush will repair the injury. Alas! poor woman," he added, in his musings, and alluding to Mrs. Sefton, "you have indeed enough to weep for, if you have lost all you love on earth—and, even had you spoilt the portrait altogether, I would have forgiven you!"

Trevelyan now returned the drawing to the portfolio, which he conveyed to the little room adjoining; and then, retracing his way into the parlour, he approached the mantel-piece to take the letter which he had written to Agnes.

But he was astounded—stupified by the conviction which burst upon him that the letter was gone!

Gone!—it might have dropped upon the floor—on the rug—in the fender? No:—vainly did he search—uselessly did he pry into every nook and corner he could think of;—the letter had disappeared!

He rang the bell furiously.

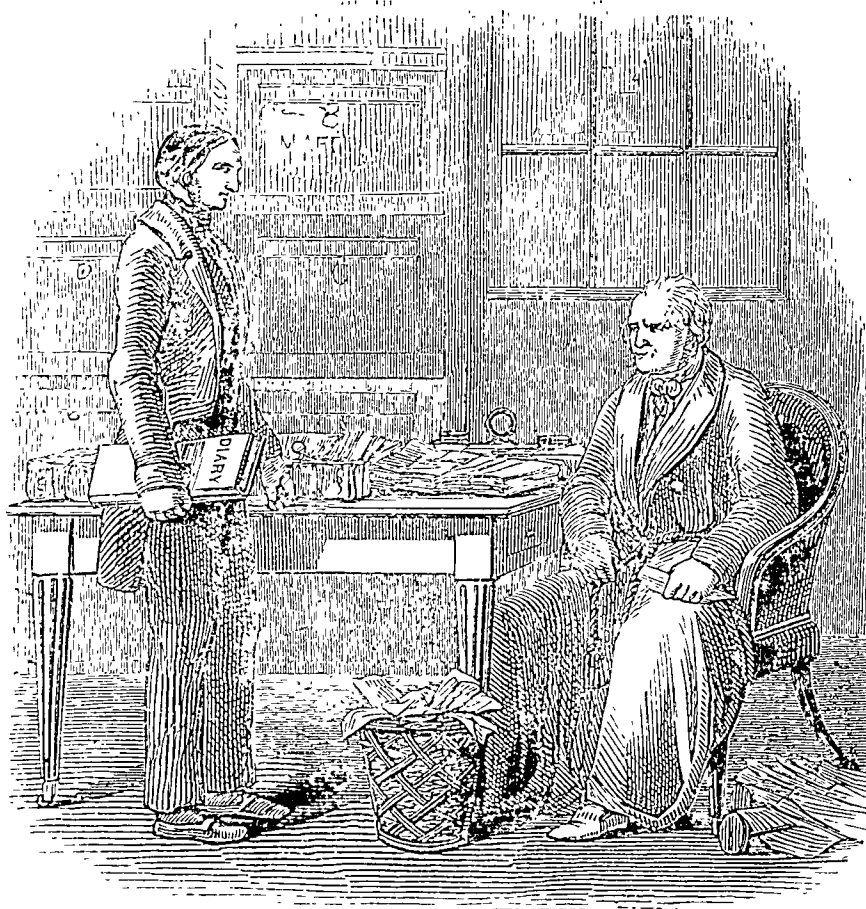
"Did any one enter this room during my absence just now, and while that lady was here?" he demanded of the domestic, who responded to the summons.

"No, my lord," was the answer.

"You are certain?" said Trevelyan, with interrogative emphasis.

"I am positive, my lord," replied the man: then, after a pause, he observed, "I hope nothing unpleasant has occurred, my lord?"

"Yes—no—you may retire," said the nobleman, abstractedly; and, when the domestic had left the room, he threw himself into a chair, overcome with amazement and grief at the mysterious circumstance that had occurred.



Could Mrs. Sefton have taken the letter? No: the idea was ridiculous. She was too much absorbed in her own sorrows to have leisure for the gratification of an idle and impertinent curiosity. Besides, was she a common thief?—for, let a lady be possessed with ever so prying a disposition, she would not carry her mania to such a point as to steal a letter—a sealed letter—unless she were absolutely dishonest and unprincipled. Surely this could not be the character of the woman whom he had seen in such deep affliction that evening,—a woman who was assuredly what she had represented herself to be, and whose appearance, manners, and language all forbade the idea that she was an abandoned wretch.

"No—I wrong her by entertaining such an injurious suspicion even for an instant!" thought Lord Will'am, when those reflections had passed through his brain. "It is impossible that this afflicted lady can have taken my letter. Besides, had she done so, would she have waited until my return? And again, of what use—of what benefit could the letter be to her?"

He glanced around, and beheld several articles of value lying about in their accustomed places. He had gone out in such a hurry that he had left a

purse containing gold upon the mantel—and, remembering the precise amount, he reckoned it, and found it to be correct. Lying upon the table was a splendid gold seal, which he had used in closing the letter that was now missed:—in fine, there were numerous objects, either costly or curious, which an ill-disposed person might have self-appropriated, but all of which had been left untouched.

How, then, was it possible to suppose that Mrs. Sefton had purloined the letter?

Nevertheless, it had disappeared; and therefore some one must have taken it?—or else some accident must have happened whereby it was lost?

Trevelyan racked his brain to discover whether it was possible that he himself had removed it from the mantel after he had placed it there: but he felt assured that during the interval which elapsed between the writing of that letter and the arrival of Mrs. Sefton, he had not quitted the apartment.

The affair was most mysterious: nay—it was also alarming;—for how could he possibly account for the disappearance of a sealed letter? If it had indeed been taken by an ill-disposed person, the contents might be made known—perhaps to the

prejudice of his sister Agnes. But he was assured that no one had entered the room during his absence;—and he was so reluctant to fix the deed on Mrs. Sefton, and had so many reasons against such a supposition, that he became equally confident she was in no way connected with the strange occurrence.

At length he persuaded himself into the belief that he must have deposited the letter in some place which he could not recollect; and, as he had in the first instance made a rough draught, he resolved to write a fair copy all over again. This was soon accomplished; and, having sealed and addressed it, he took the new letter with him to his own bed-chamber, so that he might retain it in security until Mrs. Mortimer should call for it in the morning.

It was past two o'clock when Lord William retired to rest; but, though much fatigued, he could not immediately close his eyes in slumber. The affair of the letter haunted him—filled him with vague and undefined misgivings—and assumed an aspect the more mysterious, the longer he contemplated it. He endeavoured to persuade himself that the belief in which he had so now temporarily lulled his mind was the real solution of the theory; but then would come the evidence of memory, proclaiming that he had placed the letter on the mantel in the parlour, and that he had not touched it afterwards.

In fine, he was bewildered amidst a variety of conflicting thought;—and his brain grew weak with the agitation which then jarred contention produced, so that at length sleep stole upon him insensibly; but though it closed his eyes in slumber, it did not protect him against the trouble-dreams that visited his pillow.

At about nine o'clock, in the morning he was awakened by the entrance of his valet, who came to inform him that Mrs. Mortimer had called for a letter which was to be in readiness for her.

Travelyan started up and glanced anxiously towards the night-table, almost dreading to find that second letter should have disappeared as well as the first;—but it was there in safety—and he now desired his dependant to deliver it to Mrs. Mortimer.

CHAPTER CLXVII.

THE LAWYER.

MR. JAMES HEATHCOTE, the attorney, was seated at a writing-table covered with papers, in his private office. He was wrapped in a loose dressing-gown, and his feet were thrust into large buff slippers. His grey hair was uncombed and his beard unshaven that morning; and his shirt was none of the cleanest. Indeed, his appearance denoted that, on awakening, he had risen hastily, thrown on a few clothes, and repaired straight to his office, where he immediately became absorbed in the study of certain documents in which he was deeply interested.

The countenance of this individual was by no means pleasing. A malignant light shone in his small, restless, dark eyes; and he had a habit, when vexed or irritated, of frowning—or rather contracting his brows to such a degree, that he brought them as it were to cover his very eye-lids; but if pleased—especially when he had solved a difficult question or was struck by an idea that seemed particularly lucid or valuable—he would then elevate

his brows to such a height that the movement displayed the whites all round his eyes, while the upper part of his forehead gathered into innumerable small wrinkles.

A superficial observer would have pronounced the expression of his pale features to be intellectual; but a more experienced phrenologist would be enabled to draw the proper distinction between an air of noble intelligence and one of profound cunning, shrewdness, and selfish watchfulness. These latter qualities were the real characteristics of James Heathcote; but with his clerks, and amongst the generality of his clients, he passed as a man of very fine intellect and great talents.

The room in which he was seated had what is usually called "a business-like air" about it. The grey druggist that covered the door would have sustained no harm from a vigorous application of a cup-t-broom; and the window, which looked into a little yard at the back of the house, might have lost much of its disfigurement if only cleaned once a week. But the panes appeared as if they had been purposely stung a dirty yellow, so incrustated were they with the dust that had gathered upon them.

On one side of the room were rows of shelves containing a number of law-books, the relative ages of which were marked by the colour of the leather binding—there being a perfect ascending scale, from the bright buff, indicating the most recent purchase to the deepest, dirtiest brown that characterized the long-standing and well-thumbed volume of remote date. Along the edges of these shelves were rolled long slips of dark-green serge—a meagre kind of drapery meant to protect the upper part of the volumes from the dust, and impart to the whole arrangement somewhat of the air of a regular book-case.

On another side of the room were rows of drawers much deeper and also much wider apart; and on these were huge japanned tin boxes, with names printed on them in yellow letters. To every box there was a little padlock; and the whole seemed to tell of tithe-debts to vast estates—and mortgages—and leases—and charges—and rent-rolls, contained in those sombre-looking repositories. But, alas! how few of the persons whose names were still recorded on the outside of those boxes, had any longer an interest in the deeds preserved within; how many had lodged their parchments in those warlike chests, never to recover them!

Over the mantel-piece was a portrait of Lord Eldon—a lawyer whom thousands and thousands were doomed to curse, but whom the "profession" still continues to cry up as the greatest of modern judges. Yes—for if clients complain of the lawyer's delays, the lawyers themselves rejoice; and he who is an execrable judge in respect to the former, is an admirable one in the eyes of the latter.

Stuck into the frame of that portrait was an infinite number of visitors' cards, all covered with dust, as if that assemblage of bits of pasteboard were something sacred which the profane hand of a housemaid or charwoman dared not touch. On the mantel itself was an old time-piece, the mechanism of which was exposed; and how the wheels could move at all, clogged with dust as they were, must have appeared marvellous to any one who, entering that room, gave himself the trouble to devote a thought to the matter.

We have already stated that the table was covered with papers. Along that side opposite to the one

at which the lawyer sate, were piles of those documents, all tied up in the usual fashion with tape that once was red, but which was now so faded that in many instances it was of a dirty white. They seemed to have been undisturbed for a long, long time: and perhaps were kept for show. Those papers that referred to matters actually pending, were placed more conveniently within the attorney's reach, and were fresher in appearance, the tape also being of a livelier red. Three or four files, two feet long, and covered with letters densely packed one above another, lay upon the drugget; and near the lawyer's feet was a waste-basket overflowing with letters crumpled up, and looking uncommonly like appeals for mercy and delay on the part of unfortunate debtors, but which had been tossed with cool contempt into that receptacle for all such useless applications!

It was now ten o'clock in the morning; and Mr. James Heathcote was, as we have represented, completely absorbed in the study of the documents that lay spread before him upon the table. A thin, yellow hand supported his head; and every now and then he ran his long fingers through his iron-grey hair, as if that action aided him in the solution of a difficult subject.

Presently a low and timid knock at the door fell on the lawyer's ears; and he said "Come in" without raising his head or desisting from his occupation.

Thereupon a middle-aged man, dressed in a suit of rusty black—his office garb—made his appearance, holding in his hand a long thin book which was the diary of the business-proceedings of the establishment. This individual had a pale, sinister countenance, with brown hair combed sleekly down over his low forehead. He was, however, an important personage in many respects—being Mr. Heathcote's head clerk, and exercising despotic sway over half-a-dozen subordinates in the front office. With them and towards poor clients or unfortunate debtors he was cold—stern—harsh—and inexorable; but in the presence of his employer he was cringing—mean—sycophantic—and spaniel-like.

Advancing slowly and with noiseless steps—or rather creeping up towards the table, he stood in a respectful attitude—no, with a servile demeanour and in deep silence until it should please his master to take notice of him.

"Well, Green—what have you to say to me this morning?" at length demanded Mr. Heathcote, raising his head and throwing himself back in his capacious arm-chair.

"Gregson the upholsterer, sir, cannot meet the third instalment due this day on his warrant-of-attorney for eight hundred pounds," said Mr. Green, referring to the diary; "but he called just now and told me that if you would give him till next Monday—"

"Not an hour, Green," interrupted Mr. Heathcote, imperiously. "Let execution issue. He has enough property to satisfy the greater portion—and, as his brother-in-law is his security, we shall slap at him without delay for the residue. He is a toiling, striving man, and will beat up amongst his friends to raise the necessary amount by the time we have run him up some twenty pounds' costs. What is the next?"

"Sir Thomas Skeffington's bill for five hundred pounds comes due to-day, sir," continued the head clerk; "and he proposes to renew it."

"Let me see?" mused Mr. Heathcote. "It was originally two hundred pounds that I lent this young spendthrift baronet; and he has already renewed six times. Well—let him give another bill—for five hundred and fifty, mind—don't forget to tack on the fifty, Green. His uncle will pay the debt eventually—it is all safe. Go on."

"Thompson, sir, the defendant in Jones's case, has let judgment go by default," continued Mr. Green: "he says that he would do anything rather than run up expenses; and he has been here this morning to beg and implore that time may be granted. His wife has just been confined, and his eldest child is at the point of death. The debt is a hundred and eleven pounds with costs—and he proposes to pay it at five pounds a week."

"No such thing!" exclaimed Mr. Heathcote, almost savagely. "Let him go to prison! He will be writing imploring letters, and his father-in-law will call to make terms. Those letters and visits, Green, will be another six or seven pounds in my pocket: and then we will let him out on his warrant-of-attorney to pay the five pounds a-week. It is always better to send a man in his case to prison first, although you mean all the time to accede to his proposal in the long run. He is an industrious, enterprising fellow—and his father-in-law is a highly respectable man. So he will not knock up for this little affair. Go on."

"Beale's wife called last evening, sir," resumed Mr. Green, "and says that her husband is lying in a sad state in the infirmary at Whitecross-street prison. She and her children are starving—and she begs you for the love of God to let her husband out. It is their only chance; and he will pay you when he can."

"When he can!" exclaimed Mr. Heathcote, in bitter contempt. "And that will be never. I am surprised, Mr. Green, that you should have bothered me with such a trifle, instead of telling the woman at once that her husband may rot in gaol until he pays me every farthing."

"I should not have thought of troubling you, sir, in the matter," observed the clerk, in a tone of servile contrition; "only the woman did seem so very, very miserable—and she cried so bitterly—and she had a young child that looked half-famished in her arms—"

"And you pitied her, I suppose?" interrupted Mr. Heathcote, in a tone of cool irony. "You have been in my service for twelve years to some purpose."

"Pray forgive me, sir; but—but—I happen to know that Beale's wife and family are really starving," said the clerk, whose heart was a trifle less hardened than that of his master.

"Let them starve!" rejoined the latter, with an air of brutal indifference. "Now, what have you next upon your list?"

"William Fox, the ironmonger, sir, has called a meeting of his creditors," resumed Mr. Green, now regretting that he should have allowed himself to be carried away by a scintillation of humane feeling so far as to merit a rebuke at Mr. Heathcote's hands.

"Well—I know that," observed the lawyer. "But I never attend meetings of creditors—I never accept compositions, Mr. Green. But has the fellow been here? and what does he say?"

"It appears, sir, that he laid a full and complete account of his affairs before his creditors," continued the clerk; "and that they were well satisfied

with the statement. He showed them that his embarrassments arose from no fault of his own, but simply from the failure of a large house in Birmingham."

"And what did he offer?" demanded Mr. Heathcote.

"He asked for two years to pay off all his liabilities," was the answer. "He did not propose a composition, but will settle everything in full. His brother has offered to become security for him."

"Well, he must pay me at once—within twenty-four hours—or I shall sign judgment, Green," exclaimed the lawyer. "Or stop—it will be better to sign judgment at once, and issue execution. I shall then get my money directly—and his other creditors may wait the two years. If he calls again to-day, tell him that I am out—and mind and have a seizure in his house by the evening."

"It shall be done, sir," said the head clerk: then, again referring to the diary, he proceeded thus:—"You remember that affair of Williamson, sir? He called and left seventy-two pounds the other evening to take up his bill, which had been sent back; and as you were out at the time, he could not have the bill delivered over to him. I offered him a receipt for the money: but he left it without taking any acknowledgment—saying, '*Oh! I can trust to your honour*,'—or words to that effect. Well, sir, he has called two or three times since for the bill—"

"Do the other clerks know that he paid the money?" demanded Mr. Heathcote, fixing his keen eyes significantly upon Green.

"No, sir," was the answer, accompanied by a look of intelligence showing that the man comprehended his master's meaning. "They were all gone—and I was just on the point of leaving likewise when Williamson called."

"Then issue a writ this very day for the recovery of the amount," said the lawyer. "Of course, Green, you will know nothing at all about having received the money from him?"

"Of course not, sir," replied the clerk.

"And should he go to trial, you will swear that he never paid you?" continued the lawyer, speaking with the imperious authority of a man who knew that the other was in his power.

"It would not be the first time, sir, that I have perjured —"

"Well—well!" cried Mr. Heathcote, hastily; for though he did not mind suborning his clerk to commit a crime, yet he did not like to have the deed designated in plain terms and exhibited to his eyes in all its dreadful nakedness and reality. "Let this be done, Green: and take a guinea for yourself—charging it in the office-expenses of the week. You are a faithful servant—and I am pleased with you," he added, in a patronising manner.

"I am truly grateful, sir, for your kindness and for your good opinion," said the clerk, with a low bow: but at the same time he was compelled to stifle the sigh that rose to his very lips at the idea of being so dependent upon his master, and so enthralled by circumstances as to be compelled to submit to be made the tool—the base instrument—the despicable agent of that master's hidden villany.

"Have you anything more in the diary?" demanded Mr. Heathcote.

"Nothing, sir," responded the clerk: "unless it be that the two doctors are to call to-day for the

second halves of the reward promised them for signing the certificate."

"Good! pay them each immediately, the affair having been attended with complete success," said the lawyer: "and indeed, you may give them each five guineas beyond the sum originally promised."

"It shall be done, sir," returned Mr. Green. "Have you any farther commands?"

"I am at a loss how to proceed with respect to that woman," said Mr. Heathcote, his brows lowering in token of vexation, while at the same time he ran his skinny fingers through his wiry hair.

"You mean Mrs. Sefton, sir?" said the clerk.

"Mrs. Sefton—as she calls herself," observed Mr. Heathcote, with a grim smile. "Ah! little thought Gilbert," he continued in a musing, but also triumphant tone, "that for years past I have known all and everything connected with him! Little did he imagine that his *liaison*—his amour with that lady was no secret to me, secure and safe as he deemed it to be from all the world! But what am I to do with regard to her, Green?" he demanded, as he abruptly turned towards the clerk, who stood like a menial in his presence.

"Your wisdom, sir, can doubtless suggest some plan," was the sycophantic reply. "Do you imagine that she is likely to be dangerous?"

"She loves my brother, Green," answered the lawyer: "she entertains for him that passion which never has warmed my breast—and never shall," he continued, in a contemptuous tone. "Oh! how I hate the very name of love! It is a sickly sentimentalism—a maudlin feeling, which is derogatory to the character of a man of the world, but which makes a woman dangerous indeed, when the object of her passion is outraged or wronged. Yes, Green—I do fear this Mrs. Sefton, as we will call her—since thus she chooses to denominate herself: I do consider her to be dangerous—and I know that she is of an intrepid, resolute character. She will leave no stone unturned to have what she will call *justice* done towards my brother; and by some means must I take from her the power of doing me an injury."

"And those means, sir?" asked the clerk, timidly.

"I have thought of many plans, Green," replied Mr. Heathcote: "but not one appears to be sufficiently decisive to meet the exigencies of the case. Could I only get her out of the country, or else have her locked up in some place of security, for a few weeks, I should in that interval have all my schemes so effectually carried out, as to be able to defy not only that woman, but likewise all the world."

"And is it so very difficult, sir, to encompass one or the other of the two aims you have mentioned?" inquired Green.

"On what pretence can I imprison her?" demanded Mr. Heathcote, impatiently. "But I *might* be able to induce her to quit the country," he added, in a more measured tone, and with a steadfast look at his clerk—a look which seemed to say, "Can I trust you?"

"Is there any way, sir, wherein my humble services will avail?" asked the man, thoroughly understanding the intent of that look.

"Yes—on you must I rely in this matter," said the lawyer, after a few minutes' deep cogitation. "Mr. Green," continued Heathcote, again fixing on him his small, malignant, soul-reading eyes, "you

"Will excuse me for a moment if I recall the past to your recollection—"

"But why, sir—why?" exclaimed the clerk, his pale face suddenly becoming paler still, and his limbs trembling convulsively.

"Because I choose," returned his master, brutally: "because it suits my present purpose to remind you how much you are in my power."

The wretched clerk moaned audibly, but uttered not another word.

"Twelve years ago, Mr. Green," resumed Heathcote, with deep emphasis and in a measured tone, as if he were determined that not a syllable which he intended to say should be lost on the unhappy man who was thus undergoing a painful—agonising infliction—"twelve years ago, Mr. Green, you were an attorney in practice for yourself. An accident, the particulars of which it is not necessary for me to recite, made me acquainted with a fact which placed you entirely at my mercy. You and a gentleman named Clarence Villiers had been left the joint guardians of a boy then a little more than eight years old; and a thousand pounds were invested in the funds in the name of yourself and the said Clarence Villiers. It had been agreed that you should be the acting trustee. You wanted money—you forged the name of Clarence Villiers to the necessary deed—and you sold out the thousand pounds."

The miserable clerk groaned again, more audibly than before: but his master heeded not the intense agony his words inflicted.

"Yes—you sold out the money, and appropriated it to your purposes," continued the remorseless attorney. "The fact came to my knowledge,—and I offered to save you, on condition that you should serve me—that you should devote yourself to me, body and soul—that you should see only with my eyes, hear only with my ears, and use your hands and your intellectual powers as I directed. I required a person of this description: I was looking out for such an one at the moment when accident thus placed you in my power. We soon came to terms. You gave up a business that was not worth retaining—and you became my head clerk. I have paid you two guineas a week with the most scrupulous regularity—and I have often made you little presents, as even this very morning have I done. But what more have I been generous enough to do for you? Why—I have regularly paid the interest of the thousand pounds for you, as if it were still in the Bank of England; and your ward suspects not that his capital is gone. Neither does your co-trustee Clarence Villiers suspect it, Mr. Green," added Heathcote, emphatically. "But in six weeks' time, the youth will have completed his twenty-first year; and he will apply to Mr. Villiers and yourself for his thousand pounds. Mr. Villiers will ask to accompany you to the Bank to make over the money in due form—for Mr. Villiers is an honourable man. But the money will not be there—unless I replace it for you, and thus save you from transportation for life!"

"And you have promised that you will replace it, kind sir—you have undertaken to save me from exposure, degradation, and punishment!" exclaimed the clerk, his voice and manner becoming almost wild in the earnestness of their appeal.

"Yes—and I will keep my word, Green," responded Heathcote. "If I have now recapitulated circumstances which are necessarily so indelibly stamped upon your memory, it was merely to con-

vince you that I have it in my power to save you from a terrible fate—or to crush you as I would a viper beneath my heel. We shall not be the worse friends because we understand our relative positions; and mark me—never, never would I place myself in the power of a man unless he were ten thousand times more entangled in my meshes than I could possibly be in his."

"Surely—surely, sir, you do not suspect my fidelity?" said the clerk, the workings of whose pale countenance were dreadful to behold; "surely you do not think that I should be ungrateful or mad enough to breathe a word to your prejudice? If you have done much for me, sir, I have served you faithfully; and this I can assert without fear of contradiction. I am over at your disposal—ever in readiness to obey your commands, without questioning their propriety."

"All this I know, my friend," said Heathcote, his brows now elevating themselves with triumph; for he saw that the trembling wretch before him was docile, pliant, and obedient as a deaf and dumb slave following the signals made by an oriental despot: "all this I know," repeated the lawyer;—"but there is no harm in occasionally setting forth the grounds on which our connexion is based. This being accomplished in the present instance, we may at once revert to the business that we have now in hand."

"Relative to Mrs. Sefton, sir?" remarked Green, anxious to convince his master that he was mindful of the grave and important interests now involved in connexion with that lady's name.

"Yes—relative to Mrs. Sefton," said Heathcote. "I have already observed that there are only two ways of dealing with her: either to lock her up in a place of security for a time, or to get her out of the country. The latter alternative must be adopted; and it is for you to play a part which, if ingeniously enacted, cannot fail of success."

Mr. Green placed himself in an attitude of deep attention—for all this while, as the reader will observe, he had remained standing, his master never desiring him to be seated, however long their conference might last.

"The impatience of this Mrs. Sefton is doubtless growing intolerable," continued the lawyer: "a week has now passed since Sir Gilbert disappeared—and she will speedily initiate active measures to discover what has become of him. There is not therefore another moment to lose;—and her own affection shall be made the means of which we will avail ourselves in order to baffle and defeat her. Do you repair at once to Kentish Town and seek an interview with her. She does not know you—she never saw you: she will suspect nothing—but believe everything. You will tell her that you have just arrived from Liverpool—that you are an intimate friend of Sir Gilbert—and that he has embarked for America, in consequence of serious pecuniary embarrassments. You must assure her that those embarrassments came on him so suddenly, menacing his person with arrest—and that he was so bewildered and excited by the danger and disgrace which thus threatened him, that he fled without having time to communicate even with her. You will then go on to say that he sent you up to London to break these news to her—to supply her with money—and to implore her to hasten after Sir Gilbert, whom she will join at New York. All this must you tell her;—and it

you play your part properly, it is, as I have already observed, certain to experience success."

"You may rely upon me, sir," said the clerk.

"All your presence of mind—all your readiness of invention—all your impudence, will be requisite in the matter," continued Heathcote: "for Mrs. Sefton is an intelligent woman—and the least hesitation in giving a reply to any of her questions, will assuredly awaken her suspicions, and spoil all. But if you be wary and cautious, you must come off triumphant. Believing that her connexion with Sir Gilbert is a profound secret, she will at once receive you as a friend of her lover's, from the mere fact of your knowledge of their *liaison*: because she will suppose that you could not have become aware of it, unless he had in reality made you his confidant. Then, again, the circumstance of your being the bearer of fifty guineas—which I will presently give you—as the means to defray the expenses of her voyage to New York, will confirm all you have stated and give a complete colouring to all your representations. Do you thoroughly understand me, Green?—and do you consider yourself competent to undertake this mission?—for I can assure you that it is of the highest importance for me to remove that dangerous woman from England for a few weeks."

"I do not hesitate to charge myself with the enterprise, sir," said Green, meekly,—“delicate though its management may be;—and, should it fail, it will be through no fault on my part."

"Then it will not fail, sir!" cried Mr. Heathcote, emphatically. "And now I will give you the money necessary for your purpose—and you must accompany the lady to Liverpool, remember. If a packet be not about to start immediately, then lodge her at an hotel, alleging that you are an unmarried man as an apology for not inviting her to stay at your own house until her departure. You can put up at another hotel. But all these minor details I leave to your judgment and discretion."

Mr. Heathcote now placed a quantity of notes and some gold in the hands of his clerk, who forthwith took leave of his wily master: ere he departed, however, he stopped in the outer office to issue instructions relative to the various matters entered in the diary. At length he was ready to issue forth on the mission entrusted to him; but at that moment a cab stopped at the door, and a tall, handsome, well-dressed gentleman alighted.

Entering the clerk's office, the visitor inquired if Mr. Heathcote was at home.

"What name shall I say, sir?" asked Green.

"That is of no consequence," was the hasty reply: "my business is of great importance."

"Walk in, then, if you please, sir," said Green: and, having shown the visitor into the lawyer's private apartment, the head clerk was at length enabled to hurry away to his own lodgings, in order to make some change in his toilette ere he proceeded to Kentish Town.

CHAPTER CLXVIII.

THE NOBLEMAN AND THE LAWYER.

ON entering into the presence of Mr. Heathcote, the handsome visitor tendered his card; and the moment the lawyer cast his eyes upon it, a cloud passed hastily over his countenance—for he knew

that Lord William Trevelyan, whose name appeared on that card, was an intimate friend of Sir Gilbert. He however composed himself in an instant, and, pointing to a chair, said, "Be seated, my lord."

The young nobleman accepted the invitation, and then observed, "I have to apologise for intruding myself upon you——"

"Not if you come on matters of business, my lord," interrupted the lawyer, in a tone which was intended to imply that his time was nevertheless very precious.

"I fear that you will scarcely consider my visit to be connected with business in the sense you would have me infer," said Trevelyan, courteously: "at the same time, you will give me credit for the best intentions——"

"Pray, my lord, come to the point," exclaimed Heathcote, impatiently. "I have a vast amount of work upon my hands—several appointments to keep—and my toilette not yet performed."

"In one word, sir," said Trevelyan, "may I inquire if you have received any tidings concerning your brother, who is a dear and valued friend of mine?"

"I have heard that my brother is absent, my lord," answered Heathcote, coldly: "but I have no control over his movements—and he is not in the habit of consulting me respecting his actions."

"At the same time, sir——"

"Pardon me, my lord: I have answered you—and I have not a moment to spare."

"But as your brother's friend, sir—his intimate friend——"

"I do not know you, my lord: neither do I trouble myself with my brother's friendships."

These last words were uttered so rudely—almost brutally, that the young nobleman's countenance became the colour of scarlet, and he felt that were the lawyer a man less advanced in years, he would have knocked him down for his insolence.

"I am aware, sir," he said, subduing his indignation as well as he was able, "that I have no claim upon your courtesy, beyond that which social conventions establish: but I regret to find that you should think it necessary to treat with such extreme incivility a person who has never offended you."

"Then wherefore does your lordship force yourself into my presence, and persist in remaining here, when I tell you that I am occupied with serious matters?" demanded the lawyer, rising from his seat, while his brows were bent in such a way as to render his countenance particularly displeasing and sinister at that moment.

"Serious matters, indeed!" ejaculated Lord William, also rising; "is it not a serious matter that your brother—your own brother—has suddenly disappeared——"

"I have already told your lordship that I have no control over the actions of Sir Gilbert Heathcote," said the lawyer; "and I am not to be forced into a discussion on any subject with one who is a complete stranger to me."

"I repeat, sir, that I am your brother's intimate friend," cried the young patrician, indignantly.

"But I repeat, on my side, that you are no friend of mine—nor likely to be," responded Heathcote. "Will your lordship, therefore, leave me to those pursuits which have better claims upon my time and attention?"

"Better claims! And yet you must surely have

some of the ordinary feelings of human nature," urged the nobleman, in a tone of mingled remonstrance and earnest appeal. "One word more, if you please, sir," he continued, seeing that Heathcote was again about to interrupt him: "this matter is becoming serious! For eight days has your brother been missed from his place of abode and from the circle of his friends: an investigation into so mysterious an occurrence must necessarily take place—and without delay, too. What will the world think of you, sir—you, the nearest living relative of one who may perhaps be no more—if you refuse your co-operation in this endeavour to ascertain what has become of him? I will even go farther, sir, and declare that a certain degree of odium will attach itself to you——"

"Young man, by what right do you thus insult me?" demanded the lawyer, completely unabashed, and measuring Lord William Trevelyan from head to foot with his keen, searching eyes. "Do you for a single instant dare to assert that if my brother should have met with foul play—as your words just now implied such a suspicion,—do you dare to assert, I ask, that the world would couple the slightest imputation with my good name? Though not of an aristocratic rank, my social position is an honourable one; and such as it is, my own talents—my own energies—my own hard toils, have made it. But because I can see nothing extraordinary in the absence of a man who has no domestic ties to bind him to one place, and who, acting upon a sudden caprice or fancy, may choose to depart from the metropolis, perhaps,—because I behold nothing remarkable in all this, am I to be reproached, vituperated, and even insulted by you, who adopt another view of the matter? Why, my lord, you are far more intimate with Sir Gilbert Heathcote than I, even though he is my brother;—and what would you say, were I to repair to your house—force myself into your presence—refuse to leave when solicited—and actually level the most injurious language, amounting almost to positive imputations, at your head? I appeal to your good sense, if you possess any, to consider the impropriety of your conduct here this morning, and to take your departure at once, before you irritate me more deeply than you have already done."

"I have listened, sir, with respectful attention to all you have said," returned Lord William Trevelyan; "and I declare emphatically that I am not satisfied with your reasoning. I impute nothing to you—because I know not what suspicions to entertain in the case. I frankly confess that I am bewildered, not only by the fact of my friend's unaccountable disappearance, but also by the manner in which you treat that circumstance. You declare that you cannot bring yourself to look seriously on this disappearance: surely it ought to alarm you, when I, who am so well acquainted with your brother, solemnly aver that I have particular reasons for knowing that he would not leave the metropolis in obedience to any sudden fancy or whim, without previously making a communication in a certain quarter."

"To you, I presume?" said Heathcote, fixing his eyes searchingly upon the patrician.

"No—not to myself," was the reply: "but to another."

"And that other?" observed the lawyer interrogatively: for he now began to fear that Trevelyan alluded to Mrs. Sefton, in which case he might

repair straight to her abode after quitting that office—he might there meet the clerk whom he had seen on his arrival just now—and he might mar the entire scheme that had been concocted for the purpose of inducing the lady to leave England.

"Unless you yourself are acquainted with *that other person* to whom I alluded—or at least have some knowledge to whom I could so allude—I am not at liberty to make any revelations," observed Lord William.

"Oh! this is admirable!" ejaculated the lawyer, reseating himself and appearing no longer in a hurry to break off the conference: for he now perceived the necessity of detaining the nobleman as long as possible, so as to afford Green ample time to carry the deeply-concocted scheme into effect.

"You are pleased to be jocular at something, sir," said Trevelyan, biting his lip with vexation at an insolence which he could not chastise: and leaning against the mantel-piece, he surveyed the attorney with mingled anger and aversion.

"Yes—I am jocular," exclaimed the latter; "and I again declare that your conduct is admirable! You come to me to aid you in investigating what you are pleased to denominate a most mysterious occurrence; and, by way of inducing me thus to co-operate, you yourself start fresh mysteries, and make enigmatic allusions to unintelligible matters, concerning which you refuse to enter into any explanations."

"There may be certain circumstances, sir, which a man of honour dares not reveal," said Lord William, sternly; "and such is the case in the present instance."

"You have therefore a positive proof that Sir Gilbert's friends were more in his confidence than his own brother," replied the lawyer, in a sarcastic tone; "and this is tantamount to what I told you just now."

"Yes, sir—but the circumstances to which I allude have no reference to the mysterious disappearance of Sir Gilbert Heathcote," rejoined Trevelyan; "nor do they in any way relieve you from your responsibility as a brother."

"But, since you yourself are acquainted with some mysterious and unmentionable circumstances connected with my brother," said the lawyer, still in a tone of bitter sarcasm, "I have much more reason to accuse you of possessing a clue to the causes of his disappearance, than you have to level the same charge at me. Now, from your words—for I am a man of the world, my lord—I naturally infer that the *other person* to whom you so emphatically alluded, must be a lady——"

"I did not say so, sir—I gave you no reason for entertaining such an opinion," exclaimed Trevelyan, fearful of now compromising a matter of great delicacy.

"But I choose to think so," said the lawyer, elevating his brows to an extraordinary degree, while a malignant light gleamed in his restless eyes: "and is it strange—is it unusual in the world, for a man to absent himself suddenly and even mysteriously, in order to break off a connexion of which he is wearied, and which no longer has any charms for him?"

"One word, sir," interjected Trevelyan, annoyed with himself for having made any allusion to his friend's connexion with Mrs. Sefton: "your brother has undertaken no sudden journey—of *that* I am

well assured. Would he quit his residence without leaving even a message behind him? Would he depart without even so much as a change of raiment—without the necessaries of the toilette?"

"Pooh! pooh!" ejaculated the lawyer, now throwing an expression of sovereign contempt into his tone. "A man with money can purchase a carpet-bag or a portmanteau at the first town he stops at, and can stock it well, too, with linen and hair-brushes for a few shillings. Really, my lord, you compel me to treat you as an inexperienced child, who, having got some wild or romantic notion into his head, is determined to maintain it by any argument, no matter how preposterous or far-fetched."

Trevelyan bit his lip again: for he saw that the lawyer had really the advantage of him now; and he more than ever blamed his own indiscretion in having alluded to the affair of Mrs. Sefton.

"Come, my lord, be reasonable," proceeded Heathcote, in a conciliatory tone; "and I will pardon you the rudeness—or I will rather call it the *brusquerie*, of your first proceedings with regard to me. You cannot deny that there is a lady in the case: I am far-sighted enough to have made that discovery. Well, my brother is tired of her, or has quarrelled with her—or something of that sort; and he has therefore taken a sudden trip, heaven only knows where. Do you really imagine that if I had any serious fears, I would refuse to co-operate with you in instituting the necessary inquiries? Depend upon it, Sir Gilbert will re-appear again shortly amongst his friends; and he would not be over-well pleased if he found on his return, or if the newspapers wafted to him the fact, that a terrible hubbub had taken place in consequence of his sudden departure. I am a much older man than you, my lord,—and I look at these matters more calmly—more deliberately."

Trevelyan knew not how to reply to these observations. Though they did not dissipate the alarm which he experienced at the absence of Sir Gilbert, yet he began to think that the lawyer was really sincere in giving utterance to them. He, on one side, was disposed to view the affair seriously: Heathcote, on the other, put his own interpretation on it;—and, in the same way that Trevelyan could not resist the impressions made upon himself, he felt bound to allow the merit of equal conscientiousness on the part of the attorney.

At all events, there was no utility in protracting the discourse; and the young nobleman accordingly resolved to take his leave, suspending for the present any opinion relative to the conduct of Mr. James Heathcote.

"I am sorry, sir," said he, "that I should have intruded so long upon your valuable time: I am likewise sorry if, at the commencement of our interview, I should have been hurried by the excitement of my feelings into anything uncourteous or rude."

"Now that you speak in the manner that best becomes a nobleman and a gentleman," observed Heathcote, adopting the part of one who has something to forgive and overlook, "I am most anxious to welcome you as my brother's friend. Will you step up into the drawing-room, and honour my humble abode so far as to partake of such refreshment as at the moment I can offer you?"

This proposal was only made with a view to gain as much time as possible: for the lawyer in his heart had cordially hated the young nobleman

from the instant that he had read his name upon the card.

"I return you my best thanks, sir," said Trevelyan; "but I am compelled to decline your hospitality on the present occasion."

Thus speaking, the young nobleman bowed and retired; and the moment the door closed behind him, the lawyer's countenance assumed an expression of such malignant triumph, that it seemed as if he were suddenly animated with the spirit of a fiend.

"Green has got her off by this time—there can be no doubt of that," he muttered to himself, as he rubbed his mummy-like hands gleefully together. "The woman loves my brother—and she will start away directly. Even her vanity will not induce her to tarry to pack up all her things, unless they are ready to hand; for the love of a woman who is sincere in her passion, rises superior to every other consideration. Oh! I know the human heart well; I know all its intricacies—its ins and its outs—the ravellings and unravellings of its smallest, most delicate fibres! It has been my business to study my fellow-creatures, in order that I might make them my instruments—my tools—my slaves. And I have succeeded!" he continued, with a chuckling laugh, while his brows were elevated with joy. "Otherwise I should not be the rich man that I am now. But if my wealth be already great—it must be greater. I must possess countless treasures—riches beyond computation; and until I have gained *them* I shall not be satisfied—neither shall I cease from toiling. That young aristocratic fool who was with me ere now—he affected to bully me, did he? I got the better of him. He affected to reason with me: I beat him with pure sophism,—and he has gone away entertaining a better opinion of me than when he first entered my presence. But I must examine these abstracts thoroughly," he added, still in a muttering tone, as he bent his eyes upon the documents which he had been studying; "I must note every point in these copies of the titles by virtue of which my brother holds his estates—for the management of these estates is already as good as in my own hands: and who knows—who knows how soon they may be mine altogether—yes—lands, messuages, tenements—aye, baronetcy and all?"

And as these last thoughts passed through his brain,—for he had not dared to give audible utterance to *them*,—there came such a diabolical expression—an expression of dark menace strangely mingled with the confidence of approaching triumph—over his countenance, that had any one been by at the time, the beholder must have dreaded lest that terrible man were about to throw off the mask of humanity and reveal himself in all the horrors of a demoniac nature.

We must however take leave of him for the present, and return to one whose generous and noble character forms such a striking contrast with this bad, designing man.

CHAPTER CLXIX.

A SCENE.

LORD WILLIAM entered his cab, and drove rapidly away towards Kentish Town.

It was mid-day when he reached the abode of Mrs. Sefton—for his interview with the attorney



had been a very long one: but at length his equipage stopped at the gate of a beautiful little villa standing in the midst of a garden well laid out, and having iron railings along the side adjoining the main-road.

Leaping from the vehicle, Lord William opened the gate and hastened up to the front door, which was immediately opened to his summons, by a little page in a plain but neat livery.

To his inquiry whether Mrs. Sefton were at home, an answer in the affirmative was given—the boy however adding that his mistress was engaged at the moment.

Scarcely was the response thus conveyed, when the lady herself, having caught the sound of the young patrician's voice, came forth from a parlour opening from the hall; and, tendering him her hand, she said, "Oh! I am so glad you are come, my lord—for I am cruelly bewildered how to act!"

"Has anything now transpired, madam?" asked Trevelyan, unable to gather anything decisive from the expression of her countenance, which seemed to denote mingled hope and uncertainty—a gleam of satisfaction shining from amidst dark clouds of suspense.

"Come with me, my lord," she said; "and you will advise me how to act."

Thus speaking, she led the way into the parlour, followed by Trevelyan.

A man rose from a chair on his entrance; and the sinister countenance of that individual appeared to be not altogether unfamiliar to the young patrician, who could not however conjecture at the moment where he had seen or met that person before.

The individual himself seemed to recognise the nobleman—or at least to be troubled by his presence: but, almost immediately recovering his self-possession, he bowed low and resumed his seat.

"This gentleman, my lord," said Mrs. Sefton, "is a Mr. Green of Liverpool,—and he has brought me strange—nay, the strangest tidings relative to Sir Gilbert."

"And what may those tidings be, madam?" asked Trevelyan, addressing his words to the lady, but keeping his eyes fixed suspiciously on Mr. Green all the time.

"Remember, madam, that all I have said has been in the strictest confidence!" exclaimed the latter hastily, and with a manner which only

tended to increase the young nobleman's suspicions.

"But Lord William Trevelyan is an intimate—a very intimate friend of Sir Gilbert," said Mrs. Sefton.

"It matters not, madam," observed Mr. Green: "my instructions were positive——"

"It matters greatly, however, sir," interrupted the lady. "Your tale appeared to me strange and inconsistent from the very first—though Heaven knows what motive you can have in deceiving me so cruelly, if decent it be: but now my suspicions are painfully increased——"

"Madam, you know not what you are saying," exclaimed Green: "you are insulting me, after all the trouble I have taken in this matter. But have your own way—my presence is no longer necessary here."

And, rising from his seat, he was moving towards the door, when a light suddenly broke in upon Trevelyan's mind—and it flashed to his recollection that he had encountered this individual that very forenoon in the office of Mr. James Heathcote, the attorney.

"Stop, sir!" he cried, seizing the clerk by the collar of his coat, and forcibly detaining him: "we have met before—I know you now! Scarcely two hours have elapsed since you conducted me into the presence of Mr. Heathcote, who is doubtless your master."

"Mr. Heathcote!" ejaculated Mrs. Sefton, a deadly pallor covering her countenance. "Ah! then my suspicions are to be confirmed—and he is persecuting me now!"

"Be seated, sir," said Trevelyan, pushing the discomfited clerk back into the chair which he had so recently left. "And now, madam," he continued, turning towards the lady, "will you have the kindness to explain to me all that this man has told you—the object of his visit, in fine?"

"Oh! my lord, what hideous treachery is at work!" exclaimed Mrs. Sefton, sinking upon a sofa, almost overcome by the varied emotions that agitated in her bosom. "This man introduced himself to me as Mr. Green of Liverpool, and as having brought me tidings of Sir Gilbert. He represented that Sir Gilbert, seized with a sudden terror through pecuniary difficulties, had fled to America——"

"'Tis false! false as ever diabolical deceit could be!" cried Trevelyan, emphatically. "I will stake my existence that so far from being in any financial embarrassment, Sir Gilbert Heathcote owes not a farthing in the world, and does not live even up to his income."

"Your lordship takes too much upon yourself in making such random statements," said Green: "since I am well assured of the exact truth of the story I have told the lady."

"This is a singular way for a man to express himself, if he be an actual emissary from Sir Gilbert," observed Trevelyan. "You are well assured of the exact truth of your story—are you? Then you would have us infer that you had received it second-hand. But pray continue, madam:—what else did this fellow tell you? We shall unmask him altogether presently—and perhaps his next move will be from hence to the presence of a magistrate."

Mr. Green endeavoured to assume as much composure as he could possibly call to his aid: but he did not at all admire the aspect that things were

taking—nor did he feel comfortable under the threat so plainly held out.

"Oh! my lord, what a snare has been spread for me!" exclaimed Mrs. Sefton, clasping her hands together in profound thankfulness that she had escaped the danger. "This bad man who now trembles in your presence, would have induced me to accompany him with the least possible delay to Liverpool,—thence to embark by myself in order to rejoin Sir Gilbert in New York. He has even about his person the funds to bear the expenses of my voyage:—and he would at once have hurried me away to Liverpool,—only, in the first place, a vague suspicion was excited in my mind,—and, secondly, I had particular—oh! very particular reasons for remaining in London at least a few hours longer——"

Mrs. Sefton suddenly checked herself: she was being hurried away by her excited feelings into allusions or positive revelations, on the verge of which she thus stopped short. Trevelyan did not, however, comprehend the motive of the abrupt pause which she made, but attributed it to the influence of her over-wrought emotions.

"Mr. Green—or whatever your real name may be," exclaimed the nobleman, turning round upon the clerk, "what explanation can you give, sir, in respect to all this?"

"I know not by what right you demand any explanation, my lord," said the man, determined to put as good a face upon the matter as possible.

"I will tell you by what right," returned the patrician: "by the right which every man has to protect and defend a lady against the machinations of her enemies—by the right that every honest member of society has to unmack a villain——"

"Do you allude to me, my lord?" demanded Green, rising from his seat.

"I do, sir," replied Trevelyan. "You are a villain, because you have lent yourself to an infamous trick. You cannot have been imposed upon—inasmuch as you have told many deliberate and wilful falsehoods. You pretend to have arrived straight from Liverpool, whereas you are undoubtedly a clerk in the office of Mr. James Heathcote—for you enacted the part of a clerk when I called there ere now. You would have induced this lady to quit London and repair to a foreign country, where nothing but disappointment—perhaps beggary—would have awaited her; and this act is so vile—so atrocious—so horribly base, that I can scarcely control my feelings—I can scarcely restrain my patience, while I thus upbraid you with your infamy. Were you a younger man, sir——"

But the nobleman stopped short, ashamed of wasting a monaco upon one so unworthy of the honest ire of a generous soul.

"Now that your lordship has lavished all your abuse upon me, perhaps I may be permitted to depart," said Green, with much apparent coolness, though in reality he was terribly alarmed.

"Not until you have explained the meaning of this atrocious proceeding in which you have borne so prominent a part," replied Lord William. "Make up your mind to answer my questions in a way that shall carry truth upon the face of your words—or prepare to give an account of your conduct to the proper authority."

"What—what would you have me do, my lord?" asked the miserable wretch, now unable to conceal his terror—unable also to subdue the trembling of his limbs.

"Has foul play been adopted with regard to Sir Gilbert Heathcote?" demanded Lord William, speaking in a measured tone, and fixing his eyes keenly upon the clerk.

"Good God! Does your lordship suspect that he is murdered?" exclaimed Green, horrified at the bare idea. "No—no: thank Heaven—it is not so bad as that!"

"Thank Heaven also!" murmured Mrs. Sefton, her heart experiencing a relief so great and sudden—for the man was evidently speaking the truth—that she felt as if she were about to faint through excessive joy.

"I scarcely apprehended such a frightful alternative as my words may have seemed to imply," said Trevelyan. "But delay not, man—speak—tell me—tell this afflicted lady also—where is Sir Gilbert Heathcote?"

"My lord, I dare not——"

"Hesitate not another moment, sir," cried the nobleman, grasping the clerk violently by the collar of his coat: "hesitate not, I say—or I will drag you into the presence of the magistrate. Tell me—where is my friend?—where is Sir Gilbert?"

"My lord—my lord"—stammered the affrighted wretch, his countenance rendered hideous by its workings.

"Speak—sir—I command you!" exclaimed Trevelyan, in a tone of terrible excitement. "Trifle not with me—or I shall do you a mischief. Where—where, I ask for the last time, is Sir Gilbert Heathcote?"

"In—But you will kill me, my lord——"

"Speak, villain! Where is he?" demanded the infuriated noble.

"In a mad-house!" was the reply, absolutely wrung by terror from the clerk.

A piercing scream burst from the lips of Mrs. Sefton—and in another moment she fell heavily upon the carpet, with a dead sound as if it were a corpse that had rolled from the sofa.

Trevelyan—stupified by the astounding words that had fallen upon his ear—let go his hold on the wretched clerk, on whom he stood gazing for a few moments as if he had become petrified—turned into a statue—paralysed—motionless. But suddenly he seemed to be struck with the conviction that Mrs. Sefton needed his assistance; and, forgetting in the agitation and excitement of his feelings to keep a watch upon the clerk, he hastened to raise the prostrate lady from the floor.

He placed her upon the sofa, and sprinkled water (of which there happened to be a decanter full on the table) upon her countenance. In a few minutes she opened her eyes, and gazed wildly around her.

Trevelyan drew back a few paces so that the air might circulate freely about her—when, suddenly remembering the clerk, he looked hurriedly round.

But the villain had stolen away!

At this moment a bitter groan burst from the lips of Mrs. Sefton; for a remembrance of all that had just occurred came rapidly to her mind—and the horrible word "mad-house" seemed to echo in her ears and touch a chord that vibrated with a feeling of anguish to her very brain.

She covered her face with her hands, while her bosom heaved convulsively.

"Compose yourself, madam, I implore you," said Trevelyan. "Even this certainty which we have

acquired, is preferable to the suspense previously endured."

"But is there hope, my lord—is there any hope left for me?" she inquired, removing her hands from her countenance—now so pale—and gazing up at the young patrician in a beseeching manner.

"Assuredly there is hope, my dear madam," returned Trevelyan, emphatically. "I am confident that Sir Gilbert is in the possession of his intellects as completely as ever, and that he is a *victim*—but not a *maniac*. Indeed, I see through it all!"

"Oh! now you inspire me with hope!" exclaimed Mrs. Sefton, taking his hand and pressing it with fervent gratitude: and as her face was upturned towards his own, it suddenly struck him,—struck him like a flash of lightning,—that there was in that countenance an expression reminding him of Agnes Vernon,—although he had never beheld the features of the Recluse of the Cottage otherwise than tranquil, calm, and serene. Nevertheless, the idea seized upon him: but in the next moment he said to himself, "It is mere fancy!"—and as Mrs. Sefton at that instant settled herself in such a manner upon the sofa that her back became turned to the window and the variation of light produced a change in the expression of her countenance, the idea was immediately absorbed in other and more important considerations in the mind of the young patrician.

"Oh! now you inspire me with hope!" Mrs. Sefton had said; and her face brightened up—so that it was at the moment when this sudden lustre of joy was suffused upon her features, that the above-mentioned idea had struck the nobleman.

"Yes, madam—there is every reason to hope," he responded. "The entire plot, in all its terrible iniquity, is now before me as clear as the noon-day sun. I can read it as plainly as if it were in a book. The brother is at the bottom of it all."

"Did I not tell your lordship that he was a villain?" asked Mrs. Sefton.

"Yes, my dear madam," replied Trevelyan: "but I am slow to form injurious opinions of any man. Now, however, I have the conviction of his turpitude—and I hesitate no longer to proclaim him to be all that you represented him."

"But—merciful heavens! while we are wasting time in words," exclaimed Mrs. Sefton, seized with a sudden access of wild excitement, "Gilbert is in a horrible predicament—and we should be acting—not talking."

"Haste and precipitation will effect no good in this matter, my dear madam," said Trevelyan.

"But we must find out the place where he is confined—we must apply to the officers of justice—we must release him!" cried the lady, her excitement increasing.

"Pray, my dear madam, listen to me with some degree of composure," said the young nobleman; "and I will explain to you how we must proceed, and why nothing can be done with that speed which would naturally be most consonant with your feelings."

"I am composed—I am tranquil now, my dear friend—for in such a light you will permit me to consider you," observed Mrs. Sefton, exercising as strong a control over her emotions as she possibly could command.

"In the first place I must tell you that I saw Mr. James Heathcote this morning," resumed Trevelyan. "and when I think of his cool villainy—his

unblushing effrontery—his matchless impudence, I would tear my hair with rage at the idea of how I was duped. For though I entered his office with a strong suspicion—in spite of the remonstrance which I last night made to you—I quitted his presence with a very different impression.”

“And that man who was ere now with us, is his clerk?” said Mrs. Sefton. “But what could be the motive of their base attempt to induce me to quit the country with such extraordinary precipitation?”

“The reason is apparent enough, my dear madam,” answered Trevelyan; “and I will now explain to you the whole matter, as I understand it. James Heathcote has suborned two unprincipled villains, calling themselves medical practitioners, to grant a certificate of the insanity of his brother. The law of England permits such a proceeding—”

“Then the law of England is worthy only of barbarians!” exclaimed the lady, emphatically.

“You are not the only person in the country who entertains the same conviction,” observed Trevelyan, with a smile; then, instantly resuming a serious expression of countenance, he said, “By virtue of that certificate, Sir Gilbert is suddenly seized upon and carried off to a madhouse.”

“Oh! it is horrible!” cried the lady, in a tone of extreme bitterness mingled with anguish, while a convulsive shudder passed over her from head to foot.

“The iniquity is tremendous—and yet it is legal,” said Lord William. “Yes—I blush for my country when I declare such to be the fact,—I blush also for my fellow-countrymen that they should tolerate a system which savages themselves would regard with abhorrence! Well, madam, the deed is done—the atrocity is consummated—and Sir Gilbert Heathcote, though in the complete enjoyment of his intellect, is borne off to a lunatic-asylum. James—his vile brother—will obtain the control over his property; and that is the aim and object of his wickedness. But knowing that you are interested—deeply interested in Sir Gilbert’s welfare—”

“Oh! heaven can witness how deeply!” exclaimed the lady, clasping her hands with fervour.

“Knowing, I repeat, how profoundly you are interested in all that concerns my valued friend,” continued Trevelyan, “James Heathcote sought to expatriate you at least for a season—so that he might prevent you from adopting any measures to restore the victim to the enjoyment of freedom.”

“But of what avail would a few weeks’ delay be, even supposing that the plot devised against myself had succeeded?” asked Mrs. Sefton. “If I had gone to America, I should have found that Sir Gilbert was not in New York—and I should have forthwith returned to London. Unless, indeed,” she added, with a shudder, “my heart had broken with the immensity of its sorrow!”

“Ah! madam—and it was perhaps upon this catastrophe that the vile man reckoned!” said Lord William, his blood growing cold at the extent of the turpitude which he was contemplating. “And yet a more terrible suspicion still has come into my mind—a suspicion so dreadful—”

“Name it! Keep me not in suspense!” cried the lady, observing that her young friend was himself becoming painfully excited now.

“During your absence, madam,” returned he, his countenance darkening,—“during your absence, I say—supposing that you had been induced to depart—sufficient time would be gained to drive Sir

Gilbert mad in reality; and then, on your reappearance in London, the lawyer would have defied all that you could possibly attempt or devise!”

“Merciful heaven!” ejaculated the horror-stricken woman; “can so much black iniquity exist in the human breast?”

“Alas! such schemes as these are of frequent occurrence in this land which vaunts a consummate civilisation!” said Trevelyan. “Could we but penetrate into the mysteries of the mad-house, we should behold scenes that would make our hair stand on end—our blood run cold in our veins—our very souls sick! Yes, madam—too often, indeed, is the lunatic asylum rendered the engine of the most hideous cruelty: too often does it become a prison for the *sane*!”

“You will drive me mad, my lord!” cried Mrs. Sefton, dreadfully excited: “I shall myself become an inmate—and deservedly so—of one of those awful places!”

“Pardon me, dear madam—pardon me,” said Trevelyan, deeply afflicted at having suffered his excited feelings to hurry him into those passionate exclamations which had so terrified her. “I was wrong thus to dwell on the subject.”

“No—no: it is better that I should learn the worst,” she cried, with a strong spasmodic shuddering, while horror—ineffable horror—convulsed her countenance. “But how shall we rescue him from that living tomb?”

“Abandon not yourself to despair,” replied Trevelyan. “In the first instance I must discover the place where our friend is confined: and then, trust to me to effect his deliverance!”

“Excellent man!—generous-hearted noble!” cried Mrs. Sefton, in a tone indicative of the most fervent gratitude. “But will not the law aid us in all this?”

“I have already explained to you, my dear madam, that every thing has doubtless been done by James Heathcote under colour of the most monstrous law that disgraces our statute-book,” responded Lord William. “Were I to apply to a magistrate, I could obtain no redress: he would be unable to assist me. The Commissioners in Lunacy would view the matter in the ordinary light, and tell me that when the time for the usual periodical visit to the various asylums arrived, due inquiries should be instituted. No—the lawyer must be assailed by other weapons: cunning must be met by cunning;—and much as I abhor duplicity, I will not fail to use it, if necessary, in this case. Believe me when I assure you that no time shall be lost, and that I will without delay adopt measures to discover the place where our friend is imprisoned.”

“God send you success!” murmured Mrs. Sefton, faintly: then, in a higher tone and with renewed excitement, she said, “But how can I calm my feelings—how can I tranquillise myself even for a moment, while this state of suspense shall last? And when I think of what *his* feelings must be—Oh! it is enough to drive him mad in reality when he is, and me likewise mad here!”

“But you *must* endeavour to exercise some degree of command over your emotions,” said Trevelyan. “Consider—reflect—I may require your aid in this work of deliverance; and—”

“Oh! now indeed you hold out an inducement calculated to calm me—to give me courage!” exclaimed Mrs. Sefton. “Yes—I *will* be tranquil: I *will* exercise a greater control over my feelings. I

will throw aside the weakness of a woman, and become strong in the hope of Sir Gilbert's rescue, and in the endeavour to accomplish it."

"This frame of mind becomes you, my dear madam," said Trevelyan. "And now permit me to take my departure—for there is no time to be lost."

"Farewell for the present," responded Mrs. Sefton, offering him her hand;—"and accept my most unfeigned gratitude for your noble conduct towards me and your generous intentions in behalf of Sir Gilbert Heathcote."

"You shall thank me when I have succeeded in my endeavour to restore him to you," said Trevelyan pressing the lady's hand with the cordiality of that friendship which, short as their acquaintance had been, circumstances had established and even cemented between them.

He then hastened away from her dwelling, and drove to his own house in Park Square.

CHAPTER CLXX.

AGNES AND MRS. MORTIMER.

In the meantime Mrs. Mortimer had not been idle.

Possessed of the letter which had been entrusted to her, she repaired in a hired vehicle to the immediate vicinity of the cottage, and alighted in the lane which was bounded on one side by the thick and verdant hedge that enclosed the garden.

The old woman had not precisely made up her mind how to proceed in the business which she had taken in hand: she knew that the task was a difficult one,—and she trusted rather to the chapter of accidents than to any settled or preconceived project.

For she naturally reasoned within herself that Mr. Vernon had doubtless warned his daughter not to hold any further communication with strangers: she had seen enough, on the evening of her visit to the cottage, to enable her to judge that her presence there was regarded suspiciously by that gentleman, and that her tale was not believed by him;—and she therefore calculated that Agnes had been duly and impressively counselled not to receive her again. Indeed, it was likewise probable that the young lady might have been taught to look upon her as a person having some evil object in view, and that the servants had been charged to maintain a strict watch upon her movements should she make her appearance in that neighbourhood again.

All these reflections were duly weighed by Mrs. Mortimer; and, under the circumstances which they suggested, she found it to be totally impossible to devise beforehand any particular method of carrying out her aims.

She, however, more than hoped that, as the morning was remarkably fine, with a warm summer sun rendering the face of Nature bright and joyous, Agnes would be certain to walk in her garden, if not farther abroad. Nor was she mistaken in the former portion of her expectation: for scarcely had she reached the verdant boundary of the enclosure, when she beheld, through the high hedge, the light drapery of the young lady, who, clad in a morning-dress, was advancing slowly along a gravel-walk, with a book in her hand.

How beautiful did she appear, even to the gaze of the old harridan who now surveyed her from behind

the hedge! There was an æsthetic grace in her movements—an enchanting sweetness expressed in her countenance—a gentle refinement in her bearing—and a halo of innocence around her, which rendered her a being with whom it was impossible to associate ideas of sensuality, but whom the heart might worship with the purest, holiest poetic sentiment, as if her's were an ethereal nature.

Her eyes were bent upon the volume which she held in her delicate, white hands; and her little feet moved slowly along the gravel-walk—for she was absorbed in the perusal of the book. She had not fastened the white ribbons of the straw-bonnet that she had evidently put on with a hasty negligence; and those ribbons were thrown back over her shoulders, thus allowing a shower of raven curls to descend on each side of the fair face down to the bosom of her dress.

Around that charming creature streamed the flood of sun-light, making her tresses, dark though they were, glitter like hyperions, and imparting a dazzling whiteness to her drapery, which appeared in strong relief amidst the luxuriant green of the trees and shrubs.

Mrs. Mortimer was rejoiced when she beheld the young lady in the garden—still more rejoiced when she observed that Agnes was approaching that part of the hedge behind which the harridan was concealed.

Several minutes however elapsed before the beautiful creature was sufficiently nigh for Mrs. Mortimer to address her; because she not only advanced slowly, but stopped two or three times when she met with a passage of more than ordinary interest in the work she was reading. It was the novel of "Ivanhoe" that thus rivetted her attention; and she was in the midst of the exciting scene of the combat between Brian de Bois-Gilbert and Wilfred of Ivanhoe.

Suddenly she was startled by hearing her name mentioned;—and she glanced around almost in affright—but no one met her view.

"Miss Vernon—dear Miss Vernon," repeated the voice: "approach nearer to the hedge—'tis a friend who thus addresses you."

The maiden instantly recognised the peculiar tones of the old woman who had called upon her nearly a week previously; and, without giving any response, she stood undecided how to act.

"Pray do not refuse to hear me—pray do not go away, Miss Vernon," resumed Mrs. Mortimer, whose form the young lady could now distinguish through the hedge. "I have something of importance to communicate—and not for worlds would I injure a hair of your head."

"But I promised my father not to hold discourse with any one who came not with a letter from him," said Agnes, at length breaking silence: "and moreover," she added, with some degree of hesitation, "I am afraid that you do not mean any good towards me."

"Alas! Miss Vernon, can you entertain such cruel suspicions regarding me?" cried Mrs. Mortimer, as if deeply afflicted at the mistrust implied in the maiden's words. "Of what benefit would it be for me to injure you? or, indeed, how could I possibly injure you?"

"I know not—and yet—"

"Ah! you hesitate, my dear young lady—and you will accord me a hearing," exclaimed the old woman, eagerly. "In fact, I appeal to your sense of justice

not to refuse me this opportunity of vindicating myself against the suspicions which, I am well aware, your father entertains concerning me. But, tell me—what book is that which you hold in your hand?" demanded Mrs. Mortimer, half-suspecting that it might be a novel, and in that case hoping to find a pretext for giving the conversation a turn towards the topic of love.

"It is 'Ivanhoe,' madam," said Agnes. "But really I must not remain here any longer: I should be sorry to suspect you—and yet my father—"

"Dearest lady, not even your parent's prejudices should render you capable of an act of injustice," interrupted Mrs. Mortimer, with an emphasis that made Agnes pause as she was on the point of retreating. "You are engaged in the perusal of one of the finest tales in the English language," she continued, abruptly diverting the conversation into another channel: "and doubtless you have sighed over the hopeless affection which the beautiful Jewess cherished for him whose heart was given to the Lady Rowena?"

"I have wept for the interesting and charming Rebecca," said Agnes, in the natural ingenuousness of her character: "although I am well aware that she is only the heroine of a romance, and I cannot precisely understand wherefore she should have been so much attached to Wilfrid."

"The description is so life-like—is it not?" asked Mrs. Mortimer.

"I know not—and yet it appears to me as if it were all true—as if I could easily persuade myself that such incidents really occurred, and such sentiments could positively exist," responded Agnes. "But I must leave you—"

"One word, Miss," interrupted the old woman. "You say that you could easily persuade yourself that such sentiments as those experienced by Rebecca for Wilfrid, and by Wilfrid and Rowena mutually, could actually exist. Believe me, then, when I assure you that although the incidents of that tale are a fiction, the sentiments are the very reverse—and that what the author denominates *love* is a passion felt and acknowledged throughout the universe."

"Yes—the love of a father towards his children, and of children towards their parents," said Agnes. "Oh! I am well aware that such a blessed feeling animates the mortal breast."

"And there is another phase of that sentiment," resumed the old woman, immediately: "or rather, the love which you described, is a *feeling*—whereas the love which Rebecca experienced for Ivanhoe, is a *passion*."

"I cannot comprehend you, madam," observed Agnes, who gradually grew more and more interested in this conversation, because Scott's novel had made a deep impression on her mind, and had raised up a sentiment of curiosity which, through the very ingenuousness of her disposition, sought for an elucidation of those descriptions that were entirely unintelligible or only dimly significant to her.

"Suppose that Rebecca had addressed a letter to Ivanhoe, explaining the sentiments which she entertained towards him," said the wily old woman: "would not Wilfrid have been unkind—ungenerous—even harsh and brutal, not to have perused that narrative of her feelings?"

"But his character was generous," exclaimed

Agnes, emphatically; "and he would not have refused to read such a letter."

"Precisely so," continued Mrs. Mortimer. "And now, my sweet young lady, let us suppose that it was Wilfrid who experienced an attachment for Rebecca, and that Rebecca suspected it not;—and suppose, likewise, that Wilfrid penned a letter, in respectful and proper language to the Jewess, describing the sentiments that animated him—what course should the beautiful Israelite have pursued?"

"She would have proved as generous on her side as we have already agreed that Wilfrid of Ivanhoe would have been generous on his part," answered Agnes, without an instant's hesitation.

"Such is your opinion, sweet maiden?" cried Mrs. Mortimer, interrogatively.

"I have no reason to think otherwise," was the immediate response.

"Then, Miss Vernon," said the old woman, in a tone of mingled triumph and solemnity, "I implore you to peruse the letter of which I am the bearer, and which is intended for you—and for you alone!"

Thus speaking, Mrs. Mortimer thrust Trevelyan's missive through the hedge; and Agnes received it mechanically, though startled and bewildered by so sudden and unexpected a proceeding.

"Read it, Miss Vernon—read it," cried the old woman: "there is nothing in its contents to offend you—but perhaps much to please and delight."

Thus adjured, the young maiden—innocent, artless, and unsophisticated as she was—hesitated no longer, but, opening the letter, commenced its perusal.

The first paragraph, as the reader will remember, ran thus:—

"Pardon a stranger who dares to address you, beautiful Miss Vernon, in a strain that might give you offence, were he not sincere in his language and honourable in his intentions:—pardon me, I implore you—and refuse not to read these few lines to the end! He who thus writes is the individual that you have observed occasionally in the vicinity of your dwelling; and you will perceive by the signature to this letter that he is not a man without ostensible guarantees for his social position. That his character is unimpeachable he can proudly declare; and that he will not address to you, Miss Vernon, a single word which he will fear to repeat in your father's presence, he solemnly declares."

At first the maiden's countenance wore an expression of profound astonishment when she found herself addressed by a person who avowed himself to be "a stranger," and who proceeded to speak of sincerity of language and honourable intentions. What intentions, then, had he? This was the thought that flashed to her mind. In the next moment she discovered that the letter came from the gentleman whom she *had* observed, on more occasions than one, in the neighbourhood of the cottage; and now it struck her, as if with a ray of light darting into her soul, that he must have had some object, beyond that of a mere lounge, in so frequently loitering about the precincts of the garden. Something—a something that was nevertheless incomprehensible—told her that she ought to read no more; but at that instant the concluding words of the paragraph above quoted met her eyes—and she murmured to herself, "There can be no harm in perusing the words that he would speak to me in my father's presence."

She accordingly read on, until she came to the termination of the next paragraph:—

"Let me, however, speak of myself in the first person again: let me assure you that your beauty has captivated my heart—and that, if anything were wanting to render me your slave, the description which the bearer of this letter has given me of your amiable qualities, would be more than sufficient. I am rich—and therefore I have no selfish motive in addressing you, even if you be rich also: but I would rather that it were otherwise with you, so that my present proceeding may appear to you the more disinterested. Had I any means of obtaining an introduction to you, beautiful Miss Vernon, I should not have adopted a measure that gives me pain because I tremble lest it should wound or offend you. But mine is an honest—a sincere—and a devoted attachment; and I shall be happy indeed if you will permit me to open a correspondence with your father on the subject. Were he to honour me with a visit, I should be proud to receive him. But if, in the meantime, you seek to know more of me—if I might venture to solicit you to accord me an interview of only a few minutes, you cannot divine how fervently I should thank you—how delighted I should feel! Let this interview take place in the presence of Mrs. Mortimer, if you will: I have nothing to communicate to you that I should hesitate to say before your father or your friends. Oh! how can I convince you of my sincerity?—how can I testify my devotion?—how can I prove the extent of my love?"

While she perused this portion of the letter, the following thoughts and ideas ran rapidly through her mind:—

"My beauty has captivated his heart—Oh! then he believes me to be beautiful! Mrs. Mortimer has spoken well of me to him: in this case, she cannot be a bad woman, and she cannot mean me any harm. Assuredly my dear papa was wrong to suspect her. He has no selfish motive in addressing me—even if I be rich: then, whatever his intentions be, they must be honourable, as he says—because all wickedness is undertaken for the sake of gold. He is afraid of offending me. Oh! how can I be offended with one who addresses me in such a respectful manner, and who seems to fear that the simple fact of thus writing to me will excite my anger? '*A sincere and a devoted attachment!*' Ah! such was the attachment that Rebecca entertained for Wilfrid, and that Wilfrid experienced for Rowena;—and now I perceive something different between their attachment and that which the Templar harboured towards the beautiful Jewess. He wishes to see my father—he wishes to obtain an interview with me!"—And the maiden's heart began to palpitate, she knew not why: but at this moment it struck her that the writer of the letter was of agreeable person, and that he must be what the author of "*Ivanhoe*" would have denominated *handsome*. With a gradually increasing fluttering in her bosom, the artless maiden read on—until she suddenly found the paragraph close with the mystic name of *love!*

Then a gentle flush appeared upon her damask cheek; and a veil rapidly fell from her eyes. She now comprehended how it was possible for Rebecca to be attached to Wilfrid of *Ivanhoe*:—Agnes had already learnt by heart the alphabet of love! At the same time, her soul retained all its chaste purity, though it lost a trifle of its girlish artlessness:—love began to be comprehensible to her as a refined and poetic sentiment—and not as a less divine passion or earthly sensuousness. A dreamy and unknown joy was stealing into her bosom—as if she had just been blessed with a glimpse of the realms of ethereal bliss;—and, under the influence

of these feelings, she read the letter on to its close:—

"I beseech you to reflect, Miss Vernon, that my happiness depends upon your reply. Am I guilty of an indiscretion in loving you? Love is a passion beyond mortal control! He who knows no other deity, deserves not blame for worshipping the sun, because it is glorious and bright; and my heart, which knows no other idol, adores you, because you are beautiful and good. Treat not my conduct, then, with anger: let not your pride be offended by the proceeding which I have adopted in order to make my sentiments known to you;—and scorn not the honest—the pure—the ardent affection which an honourable man dares to proffer you. I do not merit punishment because I love you;—and your silence would prove a punishment severe and undeserved indeed! Again, I conjure you to remember that the happiness of a fellow-creature depends upon you: your decision will either inspire me with the most joyous hope, or plunge me into the deepest despair. At the same time, beautiful Agnes,—(the words—those delightful words, '*beautiful Agnes*,' are written now, and I cannot—will not erase them)—at the same time, I say, if your affections be already engaged—if a mortal more blest than myself have received the promise of your hand, accept the assurance, sweet maiden, that never more shall you be molested by me—never again will I intrude myself upon your attention. For with my love is nulled the most profound respect; and not for worlds would I do aught to excite an angry feeling in your soul.

"Your ardent admirer and devoted friend,

"WILLIAM TREVELYAN."

While she perused this last paragraph in the letter, Agnes more than once felt an involuntary sigh stealing from her bosom—as if it were called up by a strain of music familiar to her childhood, and reviving many pleasing reflections.

The last portion of the letter became clearly intelligible to her, in consequence of the suggestive incidents which she had been reading in Scott's novel. For would not Rebecca have received Wilfrid's hand, had his love not been already pledged to Rowena? It was evident, then, that William Trevelyan sought her—yes, *her*—Agnes Vernon—as his wife; and that he feared lest she should be engaged to wed another! Oh! now she comprehended the full intent—the full meaning of that letter which he had addressed to her: she perceived that he loved her—that he had loitered about the cottage in order to behold her—that he wrote to her, because he feared to offend by accosting her—and that he dreaded no refusal on the part of her father, provided that she was not already pledged to become the wife of another suitor!

"You have read the letter, my child?" asked the old woman, who, even through the verdant foliage of the hedge, had watched every change in the expression of the maiden's countenance, and had thereby obtained a complete insight into what was passing in her mind.

"Yes, madam," murmured Agnes, in a tone that was scarcely audible—for she now felt embarrassed, bashful, and timid, she knew not wherefore.

"And you are not offended with Lord William Trevelyan—"

"Lord William Trevelyan!" exclaimed the beautiful girl, now seized with surprise: "Is he indeed a nobleman? Oh! I am sorry for that!" she added, giving vent in her artlessness to an expression which confirmed the old woman's already existing suspicion that her employer was by no means indifferent to the Recluse of the Cottage.

"You are sorry that he is a nobleman, my sweet?"

child?" said Mrs. Mortimer. "Are you afraid that he is too proud to make a humble maiden his wife?"

Agnes blushed deeply, and remained silent.

"Fear nothing on that head," continued the old woman. "He is no deceiver: his intentions are honourable. And now tell me frankly and candidly—has his letter displeased you?"

"I should be deceiving you were I to answer in the affirmative," responded Agnes; "and yet I feel—at least, it seems as if I feel that I ought to be displeased, although I cannot in truth declare that I am. But I will send this letter to my dear father, who is in Paris—"

"Ah! Mr. Vernon is in France," interrupted Mrs. Mortimer, delighted to find the way thus cleared for the furtherance of the projects which she had in hand; for she was resolved to make herself particularly useful to Lord William in his suit with the beautiful Agnes, so that her claims upon him might be all the more considerable. "However, my dear child," she continued, "you would do well not to trouble your father at present, since he is doubtless engaged in particular business on the Continent—"

"Oh! my father will be delighted to find that I communicate to him everything that occurs," interrupted Agnes; "and since Lord William Trevelyan so especially alludes to my dear parent in his letter—"

"Miss Vernon—Miss Vernon," exclaimed the old woman, impatiently, "this is a matter of so much delicacy, that I must implore you to be guided by me—"

"Would you counsel me not to forward this letter to my father?" asked the maiden, in a tone so low and tremulous that it afforded no aid to the reading of the thoughts that dictated the question.

"Such is the advice that I should assuredly give you, my dear child—at least for the present," was the response.

"And do you think," continued Agnes, in a tone still lower and still more tremulous than before,—"do you think that Lord William Trevelyan would proffer me the same counsel?"

"I have no doubt of it, sweet maiden," hastily replied Mrs. Mortimer. "For his sake—for your sake it were best that none save myself should become acquainted with the secret of your love—"

"Oh! madam," exclaimed Agnes, in a voice of touching remonstrance and pathetic reproach, "if this love of which you speak be a feeling that must alienate me from the sympathies of my father, and compel me to cherish a secret that I dare not impart to him, I can have no hope that happiness will be the result! Farewell, madam; restore the letter to him who honoured me by addressing me in those terms that for an instant dazzled and bewildered me—and tell him that it were better for him to think no more of Agnes Vernon!"

Having thus spoken, the maiden tossed the letter hastily, but not insultingly, over the hedge, and hurried away towards the cottage.

Mrs. Mortimer was for a few minutes stupefied by this decisive and most unexpected proceeding. She had imagined that Agnes had become a complete dupe to the specious arguments she had used to ensnare her; and she was astounded to find that her creature, so innocent and ardent assert-

ing an energy of volition which was inspired by the purest sentiments of rectitude, and which dominated over the nascent feelings of affection evidently engendered in her bosom by the suit of Lord William Trevelyan.

The old woman knew not how to act. She perceived that it was useless to endeavour to obtain another interview with Agnes—at least on the present occasion; and she was unwilling to return to her employer with the acknowledgment that her policy had rather marred than forwarded his interests. She therefore now began to reflect whether it were not better to abandon the business altogether, and return to Paris, where her daughter's affairs might afford scope for her intriguing qualifications and likewise augment her pecuniary resources. She was already possessed of between five and six thousand pounds—the amount wrung from the hands of her miserable husband; and she came to the conclusion that it was scarcely worth her while to waste any more time in a matter which, even were she successful, would only bring her a recompense of a few hundreds.

Having made these hasty reflections, Mrs. Mortimer thrust Trevelyan's letter into her reticule,—for she never destroyed documents that related to private affairs; and, returning to the hackney-coach, desired to be driven to the Borough.

She alighted in Blackman Street, and, having dismissed the vehicle, repaired to the coffee-house where she had taken up her abode.

As she was passing by the bar-parlour, in order to reach the staircase leading to her own chamber, the mistress of the establishment came forth and beckoned her into the room: then, closing the door, the woman said, in a tone savouring somewhat of cool insolence, "I tell you what it is, Mrs. Mortimer—the sooner you accommodate yourself with other lodgings, the better: 'cos, though I ain't over partickler and makes no impertent inquiries about them as paytronises my house—yet, for all that, I can't abide such visitors as come on your account just now. Leastways, I'd rayther be without 'em."

"My good woman!" exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer, surveying the landlady with an astonishment the most real and unfeigned, "you must be labouring under some mistake. I hope that I'm a respectable person; and I am sure that I shall bring no discredit on your house. As for any visitors who have called on my account, I expect none—and therefore there is an error in the matter."

"No such a thing!" cried the landlady, her cholera rising. "There was two men which come just now: and, what's more, they was officers with a search-warrant—and I couldn't perwent them from doing their dooty."

"Officers!—a search-warrant!" ejaculated Mrs. Mortimer, now becoming frightened—although she could not conceive what feature of her recent conduct could have excited any suspicion on the part of the myrmidons of justice:—but suddenly a fear of an appalling nature seized upon her—for her money was all concealed in her chamber up-stairs.

"Oh! it's very well on your part, ma'am, to put a good face on the bisness," said the landlady: "but it's nevertheless true for all that. A great tall hulking feller and a seedy-looking old man—"

"An old man!" repeated Mrs. Mortimer, now becoming sick at heart.

"Yes—an old man," proceeded the coffee-house-



keeper's wife; "and he said he was a officer with a search-warrant, and that t'other was his assistant——"

"'Tis a trick—a vile trick! I see it all—I understand it now!" cried the wretched Mrs. Mortimer, staggering towards a chair and gasping for breath:—but in a few moments she seemed to be endowed with a sudden energy, and, bursting from the room, she rushed up-stairs to her own chamber—the landlady, who was a stout and therefore less active woman, following as quickly as she could.

Mrs. Mortimer entered her room, and darted towards her trunk. The lid resisted not her attempt to raise it—for the lock had been forced. She plunged her hand amidst the clothes that the box contained, and felt for *something* underneath:—but the object of her anxious—her desperate search, was not there;—and, with a groan as it were of mortal agony, she sank upon the floor.

The landlady, who entered the room at this moment, and who was not naturally a bad-hearted being, hastened to raise the miserable woman. She placed her on a chair, and tore off, rather than quietly removed, her bonnet and shawl: but Mrs.

Mortimer's jaw fell—her countenance was ghastly pale—she seemed to be dying.

On water being sprinkled on her face, she came to herself; and the landlady said, "What is the matter with you? I can't understand the meaning of all this."

"I have been robbed—foully robbed," returned Mrs. Mortimer, in a hoarse and hollow tone: but she did not reflect that, no matter how her husband had obtained his money, she had played the part of a foul robber or extortioner towards him.

"Robbed!—what do you mean?" cried the landlady. "Wasn't them real officers as come just now?"

"No—a thousand times no," ejaculated the old woman, growing infuriate as her energies revived. "It was a base plot—a vile design:—but I will be avenged—terribly avenged! He must have found some one to advise him—some one to assist him in all this! They watched me—they marked when I went out—and, under pretence of being officers, they succeeded in searching my box—and, what is worse," she added, with a demoniac contortion of the countenance,— "they succeeded in robbing me!"

"Was it the old man who did this?" asked the landlady.

"Yes; that ancient villain, with the pale face," was the reply. "But tell me—was not his countenance pale and wrinkled?—and did he not seem nervously excited while speaking to you?"

"Just so," answered the landlady.

"Ah! I thought that I was not mistaken!" exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer, in a tone that indicated a concentration of the most ferocious rage and diabolical hate in her savage breast. "But leave me now—I must be alone for a short time—I must ponder upon all this, and determine how to act. I am not altogether without friends—nor yet without resources."

"Well, ma'am," said the landlady, "I hope you won't think no more of what I told you just now—I mean, about leaving the place. Since those fellows wasn't officers, and you ain't a suspicious person, I'm sure I don't want to get rid of you."

"I shall not leave you quite yet, my good woman," responded Mrs. Mortimer; "and I am not angry on account of what you said just now. But pray let me be alone for the present."

The landlady withdrew in obedience to this request; and Mrs. Mortimer rate down upon the bed to ruminate on the misfortune that had produced so sudden and deplorable a change in her position.

Scarcely, however, had she brought her mind to reflect with some degree of calmness on the situation of her affairs, when she heard heavy and hasty footsteps ascending the staircase.

Dreading lest some new calamity were about to overtake her, she started to her feet in trepidation and nervous excitement: nor was she reassured when the door was unceremoniously opened, and a man of most repulsive appearance bounced into the chamber.

CHAPTER CLXXI.

JACK RILEY, THE DOCTOR.

THE individual who thus intruded himself upon the presence of the affrighted woman, was about forty years of age—of middle height—somewhat stout—and of powerful form. He was not corpulent; but his build denoted immense strength,—his shoulders being broad and massive, and his limbs of large proportions. His neck was short and thick, like that of a bull; and his huge hands, when clenched, appeared as if they could fell an ox or batter down a wall.

His countenance was perfectly hideous. It was of dark complexion; and on the right cheek was a large scar of livid red, as if the flesh had been seared with a hot iron and left to heal without any surgical assistance. The low but broad forehead was overshadowed with coarse, black, matted hair, which the man wore long, and which he evidently much neglected—so that it had a dirty appearance, in spite of its jetty hue. His eyes were small and dark; and the whites—for we know not what other name to give them—were of a yellow hue,—so that an ominous fire seemed to animate those eyes, as if they reflected all the bad passions of a polluted soul. The nose, which was large, thick, and coarse, projected all on one side, and had enormous nostrils. Add to all these elements of ugliness a hare-lip, with an opening so large that it displayed two of the

man's large white teeth up to the very gum, and the reader may form a tolerably accurate idea of the repulsive aspect of this individual.

He was dressed in a greasy velveteen shooting-jacket, a rusty black waistcoat, corduroy trowsers, and heavy high-lows; a blue cotton handkerchief was negligently tied round his neck;—and his shirt, which was none of the cleanest, was open in front, the buttons being deficient—so that a portion of his hirsute chest was visible. On his head he wore an old fur cap of a tawny colour, but sadly stained with grease, as if it were tossed in any dirty nook or corner when not in use.

As the man had no whiskers, and his complexion was so dark, it might have been supposed that he had some African blood in his veins. Such was not, however, the case;—he was born in England and of English parents—aye, and had received an English education likewise. But nature had given him a hideous aspect; and circumstances had imbued his soul with the ferocity of a hyena and the subtlety of a serpent.

It is not often that the savage disposition is characterised by a profound and latent cunning—because the violence of furious passions usually absorbs all reflection in its sudden impulses and outbursts. But this man was ferocious by nature, and subtle in consequence of possessing a powerful intellect and having received a good education. Not that intelligence and mental cultivation engender craft and cunning: no—but they teach the necessity of consideration and forethought;—and the result, in respect to the individual whom we are describing, was that he knew the world so well as to be fully aware that intrigue and machination frequently succeeded where brute force could accomplish nothing.

Thus, when there was no need to have recourse to artifice, this man appeared as a very demon let loose upon society: but when cunning could gain an end, he was enabled to control his savage propensities and exercise a complete domination over his ferocious instincts.

Such was the person who burst upon the view of the terrified Mrs. Mortimer in the abrupt manner already described.

She had risen from her seat on the bed, and now stood gazing on him in speechless apprehension and amazement: but he, not heeding the alarm which his presence inspired, closed the door carefully behind him, and then, throwing his greasy cap on a chair, approached the old woman, saying, "So I understand you have been robbed, ma'am? Well—don't give way to despair: I think I can help you to the recovery of your money."

"Ah!" ejaculated Mrs. Mortimer, considerably relieved by the hope thus abruptly held out, and at the same moment animated by the conviction that the man could not mean her any harm—as she had never seen him before in her life; and, moreover, the house was neither deserted nor lonely, and it was now the broad noon-day,—under which circumstances crimes of violence were seldom perpetrated.

"Yes—I think I can help you," repeated the man. "But there is plenty of time before us—and we must have a chat over the matter in the first instance."

Thus speaking, he seated himself in a free and easy fashion; and Mrs. Mortimer likewise took a chair—for she had now become deeply interested in

the present visit, despite the revolting ugliness of the visitor.

"Who are you?" she asked: "and in what manner do you think you can aid me?"

"One question at a time, my dear madam," returned the fellow, with cool familiarity. "First, then, as to who I am. My name is Rily—Mr. Rily amongst mere acquaintances—John Rily in a police-sheet—and Jack Rily amongst intimate friends. But those who know me best call me *the Doctor*, because, you see, I was brought up to the medical profession. That was against my tastes, and only in obedience to the wishes of my parents; and so, as soon as they hopped the twig—which was when I was about two-and-twenty—I gave up mending broken legs, and took to breaking into houses. Instead of feeling pulses, I fingered purses—and found the new profession more profitable. Such a hand as this," he continued, with a horrible grin, as he extended his broad and horny palm, "was rather intended to wield a crow-bar than a lancet, or grasp a pistol in preference to a scalpel. Now, my dear ma'am, I think you may begin to suspect who and what I am."

"A burglar and a thief," said Mrs. Mortimer, who had by this time recovered all her wonted calmness. "Well—you are the more likely to aid me in my present embarrassment—I mean, in the recovery of my money: and, of course, you can dictate your own terms."

"I am perfectly assured of *that*," responded the Doctor, again grinning maliciously with his horrid hare-lip, which seemed as if it were about to split completely up his cheek. "But, at the same time, I admit with all possible candour that I cannot act alone in this business: and therefore you have that guarantee for my good faith."

"But in what way do you propose to act?" demanded Mrs. Mortimer, anxious to arrive at a more satisfactory understanding with her hideous visitor.

"I will tell you," answered Rily. "I am not known at this coffee-house; and therefore I came in just now to take some refreshment and read the paper. I saw you enter, and thought that yours was a countenance which denoted a soul alive to mischief. That was the impression you made upon me; for I must tell you that I am a bit of a phrenologist in my way. However, I had almost ceased to think of you, when I saw you come rushing out of the bar-parlour and bolt up-stairs like a mad woman. Then I marked your countenance again—and I was seized with admiration towards you on account of the horrible expression of your features. I said to myself that if ever I had beheld a she-fiend, I had seen one then."

"I am much obliged to you for the compliment," observed Mrs. Mortimer, drily.

"Let me tell my story in my own way, my dear madam," exclaimed Jack Rily, with mock politeness. "Well, I saw you bolt up-stairs, and the landlady after you; and I knew that there must be something queer in the wind. So I waited quietly reading the paper until the landlady came down again; and then I went to the bar to pay my money. A question or two that I put elicited the information that you had been robbed by two fellows pretending to be officers having a search-warrant; and the landlady, in her garrulity, gave me a description of those individuals. One of them—the old man—I know nothing of: he is a complete stranger to me;—but the other I do know,—

and what is more, I owe him a grudge—it matters not why or for what. I thereupon told the landlady that I thought I could help you in the matter; and before she had time to make any answer, I rushed up to your room to introduce myself to your notice."

"Now I begin to understand you, Mr. Rily," said the old woman. "You are acquainted with one of the robbers—you probably know his haunts—and you have a spite to vent upon him. Is this it?"

"Just so," answered the burglar. "You must also learn that the reading which I had of your countenance convinced me that I might with safety tell you who and what I am: because I never have any child's play in the business I am engaged in. If you want to get back your money, you must put confidence in me and act as I tell you; and the only way to make you trust me, is to let you know my real character. You see in me, then, a cracksmen and a prig: but I am staunch to the back-bone amongst pals."

"And on what terms do you propose to aid me?" demanded Mrs. Mortimer.

"How much have these fellows robbed you of?" asked Rily.

The old woman hesitated for a few moments: she knew not whether it were prudent to tell the truth to her new friend, who so deliberately announced himself as a gentleman exercising a profession which could not possibly be characterised by any particular scruples or punctilios.

"Well—just as you like, ma'am," said Jack, rising from his seat. "By declaring on to the swag,* I may get my reglar† from the two prigs, whom I can easily trace out; and therefore, if you are afraid to trust me, I shall be off at once. In this case, mind, you will never see a penny of the money you have lost."

"Stay, Mr. Rily—stay!" exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer, who perfectly comprehended the man's meaning, which was to the effect that he *might* obtain some of the booty for himself without her co-operation; whereas she could not recover a shilling unless assisted by him.

The burglar coolly reseated himself.

"You asked me of how much I was robbed?" she said, interrogatively.

"Yes," was the laconic response.

"Five thousand four hundred pounds," observed Mrs. Mortimer.

"My stars! is it possible?" exclaimed Rily, his horrible countenance expanding with delight.

"It is the truth, I can assure you," rejoined the old woman.

"Five thousand four hundred pounds," repeated the burglar, in a slow and measured tone, as if to prolong the enjoyment of the sweet music which the mention of such a sum made for his auricular sense.

"It is a serious loss—is it not?" asked Mrs. Mortimer, anxiously watching his countenance, its expression denoting hope—nay, even indicating a certainty of success in the endeavour to recover the amount: but that same tablet of the mind gave no

* Letting the thieves know that he was aware of the fact of the robbery, and demanding a portion for himself. This is a common practice amongst thieves; and the claim of the person thus "declaring on" is seldom disputed, even though he had nothing to do with the robbery.

† Share of the plunder.

assurance that the man would act honourably towards her in the end, and content himself only with a share.

"Five thousand four hundred pounds!" he again repeated, in a musing tone. "Yes—'tis a serious loss! The recovery, however, would be two thousand seven hundred a-piece: would that suit you?" he demanded, turning abruptly towards her.

"What?" she said, affecting not to comprehend the question.

"Will you agree to give me one half of the sum, if I recover the whole?" asked Rily. "That is plain English, I believe—and now it depends on you whether our conversation shall be prolonged or not."

"Yes—I will cheerfully give you one half," returned Mrs. Mortimer, making up her mind to keep to the bargain only in the case of her inability to depart from it with safety to herself.

"Well and good," resumed Rily. "I must now inform you that the tall fellow who was with the old man is one of the most noted cracksmen in London—a desperate ruffian, who would think no more of shooting a person through the head than of eating his dinner. What his real name is, I don't know—I never heard—although he and I have been acquainted for years past: but he is called *Vitriol Bob*, from a little peculiarity which he has introduced into his professional mode of doing business."

"I do not catch your meaning," said Mrs. Mortimer—though not without a shudder; for she *did* entertain a vague suspicion of the frightful origin of that singular pseudonym.

"I'll explain myself more fully, ma'am," returned the Doctor, "since we have all the day before us, and may chatter a bit to while away the time. You see that the individual of whom we are speaking, has an awkward knack of lurking about in bye-streets and secluded neighbourhoods, to way-lay gentlemen who happen to have gold chains hanging over their waistcoats or out of their fobs: for those little articles are pretty faithful evidences that the purses of such folks are not entirely empty. Well, in case of a struggle, our friend is apt to break a phial of vitriol over the face of his opponent, so that he may get away, and also that the said opponent may be blinded, and unable to identify him on any future occasion. Hence his name of *Vitriol Bob*; and such is the terror he has inspired throughout the districts of Kennington, Camberwell, Peckham, and thereabouts, that the moment any gentleman returning home from a party or from the tavern hears the ominous sound of '*Your money or your eyes*,' he exclaims, '*Don't throw the vitriol, and I'll give up everything*.'"

"Is this possible?" cried Mrs. Mortimer, with a shudder that was colder and more perceptible than the former one.

"Oh! quite possible, ma'am. I can assure you," said the Doctor, calmly. "You shall see *Vitriol Bob* to-night—and then judge for yourself whether he looks like a fellow who could do such a thing, or not. A more hang-dog countenance you never saw in your life. I know that I am not particularly handsome," he added with a horrible grin and leer: "but I don't look quite such a bravo as he does."

Mrs. Mortimer thought that if *Vitriol Bob* were more hideous in outward appearance than Jack Rily, he must be frightful indeed.

"This is the chap we shall have to deal with to-night," continued the burglar; "and therefore, as you perceive, we must go well prepared to play the

game properly. Who his companion is in the robbery, I can't make out——"

"But I know," interrupted Mrs. Mortimer, hastily: "he is a poor—weak—emaciated—nervous old man, whom I will undertake to subdue and even bind with cords in a few moments. Oh! he shall find me a very tiger-cat let loose upon him!" she added, her countenance suddenly expressing a hyena-like ferocity.

"Now you do seem handsome—royally handsome—although in reality you are so infernally ugly!" exclaimed Jack Rily. "That is the way in which I like to see a woman look. Why—perdition seize me! but I could almost love you. What a splendid couple we should make!"

And the idea tickled the wretch's fancy to such an extent, that he laughed until the tears streamed from his yellow eyes, and ran down his dark countenance, while his hare-lip opened so wide that all his upper teeth—large, perfect, white, and even—were displayed to the gums.

"Cease this disgusting mirth, sir," exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer, unable to restrain her feelings: for—ugly, criminal, and morally degraded as she knew herself to be—the observations of the monster and his consequent hilarity outraged her cruelly.

"Come—come; we must not be bad friends," said Jack Rily, extending his huge palm towards the old woman, who proffered her hand in return through fear of offending the wretch that had become too useful for her to lose him until the contemplated business should have been accomplished. "There—that's right," he added, as he shook her hand with a violence that made her wince: "now there is no ill-feeling between us. But really you must pardon me for what I said, and also forbear from taking offence so easily should I fall into such remarks again. For, look you, madam,—I do not care about female beauty—neither is old age disgusting to me. What I admire in a woman is her disposition—her *mind*: and when I see you flaring up like a hell-rat—when I behold you waxing infuriate as a beldame—I love you better than if you was the most lovely virgin on the face of the earth. However—enough of that——"

"Enough indeed!" cried Mrs. Mortimer, who experienced the most ineffable repugnance—the most profound loathing for the monster that thus dinned his hideous idiosyncrasies in her ears: but, veiling her abhorrence as much as she could, she said, "And now, perhaps, you will have the goodness to inform me how you intend to proceed in order to recover this large sum of money."

"The explanation is simple enough," responded the Doctor. "*Vitriol Bob* has a particular haunt—a certain lurking-hole, not a hundred miles from here; and I happen to know where the place is. In fact, Bob and I have been pals for a long, long time——"

"I thought you told me just now that you had a spite against him?" interrupted Mrs. Mortimer, fixing her eyes keenly upon the Doctor, as if to read the secrets of his inmost soul and learn whether he were deceiving her.

"Ah! you may look, ma'am—and look as searchingly as you like," exclaimed Jack Rily, who understood what was passing in her mind: "but you won't find me out in any contradiction—nor yet in telling you any lies. I said that *Vitriol Bob* and I had been friends for a long time—and I said truly. But that doesn't prevent me from having a hanker-

ing to be avenged for a trick he played me, and which he does not think I even suspect. The fact is, we robbed a house together; and Bob in ransacking a chest of drawers, got hold of a bag full of sovereigns. He stuck to them, and never uttered a word about them when we afterwards divided the swag. I found it out through an advertisement that appeared in the papers offering a reward for the apprehension of the burglars, and specifying the things stolen. He never saw that advertisement, I know; and I did not tell him of it. I however swore to have my turn against him sooner or later;—and I bided my time. That time is now come—and I shall let him know it before many hours are over his head."

"But are you certain that you can find him? and, even supposing that you do succeed in tracing him to his lurking-hole, how do you know that the old man will be there also?" demanded Mrs. Mortimer.

"There is no tracing out Vitriol Bob in the matter," exclaimed Jack Rily. "The moment he has committed a robbery, he always goes straight to his usual haunt, and remains there for a few days till the storm has blown over. As a mere precaution, he will compel his pal—this old man—to go with him; because if the latter was taken up by the Detectives, he might be induced to peach against Bob—and all that. So I am sure we shall find them together: unless, indeed," added the Doctor, in a tone of diminishing confidence,—“unless, I say, the old man knows that you dare not raise a hue and cry touching this robbery."

"On the contrary," returned Mrs. Mortimer, "that old man, whose name is Torrens, has every reason to believe that I would persecute him with the most implacable vengeance which a human being is capable of experiencing or inflicting."

"So much the better!" cried Jack Rily, grinning joyously: "in this case we are sure of our prey."

"And is the game to be played by violence, or by cunning?" asked Mrs. Mortimer.

"By violence, my good lady—by violence, to be sure!" responded the burglar, his eyes glowing savagely, with their ominous yellow lustre—as if the orbs of a tiger were glaring upon the woman: and, though the gorgeous sun-light was flooding the small chamber with its golden haze, still shone that yellow lustre apart—distinct—and sinister.

"By violence?" repeated Mrs. Mortimer, awful thoughts relative to Vitriol Bob's peculiar mode of proceeding rushing in upon her soul.

"How can it be done otherwise?" demanded Jack Rily. "When I first came up to you just now, I was going to propose to enlist in the service a pal of mine—and of Vitriol Bob's also—who would aid and assist: but then he would require his thirds as a matter of course. Since, however, you have informed me that Bob's companion in the robbery is an old, emaciated, feeble man, and that you can master him by yourself, you and I will keep the business in our own hands. I will undertake to tackle Vitriol Bob, if you will make sure of the other."

"And supposing that your opponent should overpower you?" said Mrs. Mortimer.

"I will take care that he does not," returned Rily. "Trust me to subdue him—"

"And without bloodshed?" observed the old woman, shuddering—for, depraved and wicked as

she was, she grew cold and her heart sank within her at the idea of murder.

"Come, if you're squeamish, you had better abandon the project and leave it all to me," said the Doctor. "If Vitriol Bob should place my life in danger, at that moment he is a dead man. Self-preservation, ma'am, is the first law of nature. At the same time, I shall not kill *him*, unless it is to save *myself*: of this you may be assured."

The old woman remained silent for some moments. Should she embark in an enterprise so replete with danger?—should she incur the risk of becoming an accomplice in a murder? She trembled at the thought: and yet her money—the money that she had come over to England to obtain—would be totally lost to her were she to shrink from the endeavour to recover it. It was true that, even if it were regained, one half would pass into the hands of a stranger: but was it not better to return to Paris with two thousand seven hundred pounds in her pocket, than with an empty purse? The stake was worth venturing;—and her indecision vanished.

"I am *not* squeamish in the matter," she said at length. "Our bargain and our arrangements hold good in all respects. That villain Torrens shall not have the laugh against me: on the contrary, I must be avenged upon him!"

"There!—now you are my fine old hyena—my adorable tiger-cat, once again!" cried the Doctor. "I long to see you pounce upon old Torrens, as you call him; and I would give the best five years of my life, could I endow you with a complete set of claws, instead of those comparatively harmless finger-nails! Wouldn't you tear his eyes out of his head? wouldn't you strike them deep into his flesh? Do you know that Satan will obtain a glorious acquisition when the time comes for him to make a fiend of you?"

And again the monster's horrible hilarity rang through the little chamber, as he threw himself back in the chair and laughed with the most savage heartiness.

"For mercy's sake! cease this unnatural gaiety," exclaimed the old woman, scarcely able to subdue her rage.

"Oh! I must laugh," cried the wretch, sputtering through his frightful hare-lip,—“if it is only to make you look as ferocious as you do now."

Mrs. Mortimer turned towards the window with disgust; and the wretch's mirth died away in guttural sounds.

"Come, now—I told you that you must not be angry with me, madam," he said, at length. "It is my nature to laugh heartily at times—and surely you won't check such an innocent propensity. But I will take my leave of you now; and at half-past ten to-night we must meet at some place as near Stamford Street as you choose."

"Where shall it be?" asked the old woman. "Name the spot—and I shall be punctual to the moment."

"There is a narrow lane running along the side of Christ Church burial-ground," responded the burglar, after a few moments' reflection: "it leads from the Blackfriars Road into Collingwood Street—I suppose you know London well—"

"Oh! perfectly. Go on," said Mrs. Mortimer.

"Well—we will meet in that crooked lane at half-past ten exactly," continued Jack Rily. "By the by," he added, rising from his chair, "you had better tell the landlady down stairs that you found

out I could do nothing for you, and that you have resigned yourself to put up with your loss. It will prevent her from suspecting anything queer on account of your going out so late and remaining away an hour or so."

"Leave that to me," replied Mrs. Mortimer: "I shall know how to make all the excuses that are necessary. Indeed, if we are successful, I shall not return again to this place," she observed, sinking her voice to a low whisper.

"Well—that is your business. And now goodbye for the present: at half-past ten we meet in the place appointed."

Mrs. Mortimer spoke a few words of assent; and the Doctor took his departure, bestowing upon the woman a familiar nod, accompanied by a grin and a leer, before he crossed the threshold and closed the chamber-door behind him.

When Mrs. Mortimer was left alone, she began to ponder deeply upon the particulars of this interview which had just terminated.

The man knew the hiding-place where it was presumed that Vitriol Bob and Torrens had taken refuge; and it was doubtless some cellar or dangerous place, where a crime might be committed with impunity, as well as where the perpetrators of crime might conceal themselves. Then, what guarantee had she that Rily would not make her his victim, after availing himself of her services in subduing the plunderers and recovering the stolen treasure?

She shuddered as she thought of the peril into which she was about to precipitate herself: she trembled from head to foot as she pondered upon the desperate character of the man who was to be her companion in the night's enterprise.

And yet—in spite of his revolting ugliness and his avowal of a dark career of turpitude—there was something like fairness in his speech respecting a partner in any enterprise in which he might be engaged: moreover, had he not shown, by the mere fact of the spite which he cherished against Vitriol Bob, that his ideas of the honour that ought to prevail even amongst thieves, were of a fixed and positive nature? Lastly, had he not stipulated upon the precise amount that he was to retain for his services? And would he be thus minute and nice in details, if he cherished the intention of self-appropriating the whole?

These arguments, which Mrs. Mortimer seriously revolved in her mind, may not perhaps appear very convincing nor very satisfactory to the reader; for, after all, they were only so many suppositions placed in juxtaposition with the atrocious character of an avowed desperado. But let it be remembered that we often reason ourselves into what we wish to believe, rather than into what we ought to believe; and we tutor our minds to put faith in those opinions that best suit our interests rather than our safety. This is like "hoping against hope:" still it is a general characteristic of human nature; and Mrs. Mortimer's case proved no exception to the general rule.

In fine, she came to the conclusion that Jack Rily was a monstrous rogue in respect to the world, but an honest man towards his pals—that he would strip society, were society a single individual, of its last shirt, but would not lay his finger on the costliest robe if on the back of an accomplice—and that he meant to act, with regard to herself, in the fairest way possible.

Whether her expectations were fulfilled, will shortly appear.

We cannot, however, close this chapter without recording a few comments upon that extraordinary disposition in human nature to reason one-self into the belief which one wishes to adopt, to the repudiation of that which one ought to adopt. For instance, the man who is floundering about in a perfect morass of pecuniary troubles, from which he cannot possibly see any chance of emerging, incessantly dins in his own mental ears the most absurd sophisms to convince himself that his position is not so desperate as it appears. "Well, something must turn up," he says: "things are sure to take a turn soon. I can get Jones to renew the bill which he holds of mine, when it becomes due—Tomkins will hold his bill over for a few weeks—and Brown will lend me the money to satisfy Smith." In this manner does the poor devil go on with his castle-building, until he can no longer blow from his imagination's pipe another soap-bubble wherewith to amuse himself. Jones positively refuses to renew—Tomkins proves inexorable in his demand for instantaneous payment—Brown, having heard of his difficulties, will not lend him a farthing—and Smith, anything but satisfied, puts a clencher on the whole through the medium of the sheriff's-officer. Then, when the self-deluded wretch awakes from his dream, on finding himself in gaol or on his way to the Bankruptcy Court, he says to himself in the bitterness of his spirit, "I always knew it would come to this!"—although for years he had been straining every effort of the imagination to lull his mind into a contrary belief!

In the same way does the bashful lover, who has not as yet proposed to the object of his affections, but who nevertheless longs to do so, yet fears, because he has seen her smile more sweetly upon a handsomer youth than ever she did on him,—in the same way does he strive to persuade himself that she *does* really love him—that he has observed stealthy glances cast from her brilliant eyes towards him—that her hand has trembled in his own—that her voice has faltered when she has responded to his common-place remarks upon the weather, the opera, and the new novel—that it is a mere flirtation between herself and the *other* handsome youth,—in fine, that she is dying to receive the proposal which he has not the courage to make. And in this manner does he tutor himself to lead a life of "pleasing pain," though all the while aware that the sorest misgivings lie at the bottom of his heart, beneath the superstructure of delusive hopes and fond imaginings which perforce he has conjured up there. Then, when at last he hears from some kind friend that the beautiful Miss So-and-so was married yesterday morning to the handsome young gentleman whom she had loved all along, the self-deluded wretch exclaims, "Ah! I never thought that she cared a fig for me!"

But worse—oh! far worse is it with the criminal! Let us take, for instance, the confidential clerk, who, for the sake of a mistress or through love of fine clothes and ostentatious display amongst his acquaintances, pilfers from his master's till. At first his peculations were small and insignificant; but, being undiscovered, he grows bolder and more deeply guilty,—while he endeavours to reason himself out of the agonising fears that haunt him

day and night—pursue him like the spectres of murdered victims—and turn his wine into gall, and the sweets of Beauty's lip into bitterness. "It is impossible that I can be detected," he mentally exclaims a thousand times in an hour: "my precautions are so well devised. In a large business such as this, a few shillings are not missed. Besides, I so arrange the entries in the books that the expenditure and the receipts are proportionate. My employer, too, is kinder towards me than ever: I possess his confidence—not for an instant would he suspect me! And even if I were found out,—not that I can be,—but, I say, even if I were, he would not suffer me to be disgraced—he would hush it up: he would never let me be dragged into the felon's dock!" Thus will the infatuated being reason on, although he sees that his master is growing cold in his manner, and that there is a suspicion of foul play somewhere,—until at length the explosion takes place—the self-deluded mortal is hurried to a felon's gaol—his employer proves inveterate and inexorable—he is doomed to transportation—and in the convict-ship he exclaims in terrible anguish of mind, while writhing as if in mortal agony upon his hard pallet, "Fool that I was not to have stopped short while it was yet time: for I always foresaw that this must inevitably be the end of it all!"

Gentle reader—never against your own settled convictions endeavour to set up a fabric of delusion: you may at length succeed in throwing the former into the background, and persuading yourself to believe that the latter is a substantial truth;—but you will in the long run discover to your cost that you have stepped out of the broad and straight highroad to flounder amidst the perils of an interminable bog.

CHAPTER CLXXII.

A MAIDEN'S FIRST LOVE.

THE day, the incidents of which we are describing, and which are so numerous and diversified, was destined to be a memorable one in the life of Agnes Vernon.

The young maiden, on abruptly quitting Mrs. Mortimer, returned to the cottage; and, seating herself at the table in the elegant parlour, she arranged her drawing materials with the intention of continuing a landscape which she had commenced a few days previously.

But she was unsettled and restless: new sensations stole upon her—new feelings were excited in her bosom.

The solitude of the cottage suddenly appeared to be irksome; and she felt discontented with her condition—she knew not why.

Laying down her pencil, she rose from her seat, approached the window, and gazed forth upon the open country.

A carriage passed by: in it were two young ladies and two young gentlemen—and they were all in high spirits, conversing cheerfully and laughing gaily. Agnes sighed—for the thought struck her that she too might be happy, and she too might laugh gaily, if she only had friends and companions!

Presently a lady and gentleman, each on horseback, passed along the road in front of the cottage. They were proceeding at a very gentle pace, and

were engaged in conversation. The veil was raised from the fair Amazon's countenance, and was thrown back over her riding-hat; her cheeks were blooming with a carnation tinge, and her eyes were bent with melting tenderness on her companion, whose face was turned towards her, and whose language was doubtless pleasing to her ears. The countenance of that lady indicated such real pleasure—depoted such pure and genuine happiness, that again did a sigh escape from the bosom of Agnes Vernon, as she marvelled why she herself was retained in the prisonage of solitude, while other maidens of her own age had their acquaintances and their associates, and were allowed to divert themselves in walking or riding about the rural lanes and the roads that stretched amidst the green fields.

Never before had anything in the form of re-pining—never until this time had a sentiment partaking of discontent, arisen in the breast of Agnes Vernon. She endeavoured to conquer the feeling: she turned away from the window and played with a beautiful canary bird that fluttered from its perch towards the front of its handsome cage the moment she approached it;—but its chirping sounded no longer as sweet music in her ears—and, in the natural goodness of her gentle soul, she reproached herself for her indifference to the joyous testimonials offered by the little feathered chorister to its mistress.

She resumed her seat, and once more directed her attention to her drawing: but she felt in no humour for an employment that until now was amongst her most favourite recreations. Closing her portfolio, she took up "Ivanhoe," in order to read the concluding pages of the tale: she however found her thoughts speedily wandering to other subjects,—the letter of Lord William Trevelyan—the discourse of Mrs. Mortimer—and the abrupt termination of her interview with that female. Throwing aside the book, she seated herself at the piano, and ran her taper fingers over the keys: but the music had no cheering influence upon her—produced no soothing effect on her restless soul.

Vexed and annoyed with herself for what she could not help, and almost alarmed at the change which had come over her, despite of her exertions to the contrary, the bewildered maiden returned to the garden and gathered fresh flowers wherewith to fill the vases in the parlour: but the tulip seemed less beautiful, the rose less fragrant, and the pink less sweet than she had ever before known them;—and her task was accomplished hurriedly and even neglectfully.

At length she sought an arbour in the most shady and retired part of the garden; and there—alone with her own thoughts—she fell into a profound reverie upon her secluded life, the mystery that enveloped her condition, the letter of Lord William Trevelyan, and the explanations that Mrs. Mortimer had given her respecting the passion of love.

For, oh! the gentle Agnes loved now:—hence this restlessness—hence this change which had come upon her!

She did not blame herself for the part she had enacted in respect to Trevelyan's letter: her conscience told her that she had behaved with prudence and propriety;—but she was grieved to think that any words which had fallen from the lips of Mrs. Mortimer should have cast suspicion upon the sin-

cerity of the individual who had penned the contents of that missive.

Then she thought within herself that perhaps the old woman had deceived her—that Trevelyan could not possibly empower his messenger to contradict with her lips the assurances he had committed to paper!

"Did he not say in his letter that he sought no secrecy nor concealment in respect to my father?" she asked herself, in the course of her musings: "how, then, could he prompt his agent to enjoin the necessity of such secrecy and such concealment? Ah! she has deceived me—and I have wronged him!"

A feeling of bitterness smote the tender heart of Agnes as she came to this conclusion: but, in the course of a few moments, the idea struck her that if Lord William Trevelyan received a faithful report of the particulars of her interview with Mrs. Mortimer that morning, he would recognise the propriety of her conduct in returning the letter.

But, ah! had she not bade Mrs. Mortimer desire the young nobleman to think no more of Agnes Vernon?—and might he not obey the injunction?

Poor, innocent Agnes! thine own love is as yet only in its infancy—and therefore thou comprehendest not the extent of that devotion which Trevelyan's bosom harbours with regard to thee! Although within the space of a few hours thou hast learnt thy first lesson in the school of love, and though thy mental vision has obtained some insight into the mysteries of that passion which has at length shed its influence on thee,—although a portion of the veil has fallen from thine eyes, and thou canst now read more of the human heart than ever thou could'st before,—nevertheless, it is but a nascent flame—a germinating affection that animates thee,—a feeling as yet vague and undefinable; for thou art still so much the child of natural simplicity and artless ingenuousness, that thou canst not entertain a conception of the lasting and persevering nature of love;—thou knowest not enough of its essence and its power to initiate in thine imagination the thought that Trevelyan would no more heed thine injunction, even if it reached his ears, than the tempest will obey the human voice which dares to order its fury to subside!

For some hours did the beautiful Agnes remain in the arbour, plunged in love's first reverie; and when the pretty housemaid appeared to inform her that dinner was served up, Miss Vernon started from the seat, exclaiming, "Is it possible that it can be four o'clock? I did not suppose that it was more than an hour past mid-day!"

Jane cast a look of surprise upon her mistress—but said nothing; and almost immediately afterwards the servant ceased to remember that there had been anything peculiar in the young lady's manner—for Agnes composed her countenance, recalled her scattered thoughts, and hurried back to the cottage,—so that this very haste on her part was mistaken by the domestic for her usual gleesomeness of disposition.

The afternoon repast was soon disposed of; and Agnes returned to the garden, where she roamed about until the hour of sunset approached. The evening was warm and beautiful—the air was fragrant with the perfume of the flowers—and the hum of insect life was heard around. The scene had a soothing effect upon the young maiden's soul; and, though she was wearied, she was un-

willing as yet to return to the cottage. She felt less lonely in the spacious garden than she should be, as she well knew, in that parlour where she had vainly endeavoured in the morning to divert herself with her drawings, her music, and her books.

We know not how it was—but more than once during this evening ramble in her garden, did Agnes Vernon pass by that very spot where she had stood in the morning when held in conversation with Mrs. Mortimer. Those who love, or who have loved, will probably assert that it was the influence of some vague and undefined hope which thus occasionally directed the maiden's footsteps thither,—a hope which nature prompted, although thus dimly, and in spite of the virgin purity and immaculate candour of her soul,—a hope, in fine, which whispered, softly as zephyr's breath, in her ear, that Trevelyan's messenger *might* return with an assurance from him that no instructions which he had given to that emissary in any way militated against the honourable, frank, and straightforward declarations contained in his letter.

And now, then, behold the beautiful Agnes standing on the very spot where in the morning she had read the letter that first awoke a scintillation of love's fire in her bosom: behold her, motionless as a statue, amidst the foliage of that secluded part of the garden—her white dress delineating the soft and graceful outlines of her symmetrical form—and the rays of the sun, now low in the western horizon, playing upon her angelic countenance, as they penetrated through the trees that skirted the lane overlooked by the hedge.

Suddenly the maiden starts and listens—like the timid roe disturbed in the forest by a far-off sound resembling the bay of the hound.

The noise of wheels and of horses' hoofs falls upon her ear: nearer and nearer that noise approaches—the vehicle is evidently coming down the lane!

Yet why does her heart palpitate?—why seems it like the fluttering bird in its cage? Is it an unusual thing for a carriage or a cart to pass that way? No: but there is in the maiden's soul a presentiment that the occurrence now is not altogether unconnected with her destinies.

The sounds cease: the vehicle, whatever it may be, has stopped—and silence once more reigns around.

The sun is sinking lower and lower in the western horizon: yet it is still quite light;—but the ruddy lustre of the setting orb imparts a deep autumnal hue to the foliage—brings out into bolder relief the ripening apples, the yellow pears, and the crimson cherries that gem the boughs with their fruitage—and imparts a delicate glow to the beautiful countenance of the young lady, as, with lips apart and in attitude of suspense, she listens to catch the slightest sound that may indicate the approach of a human being.

And now there is a rustling as of silk and a tread as of light footsteps; and Agnes, who, in consequence of the surface of the garden being much higher than the lane on the other side of the hedge, can look over that verdant boundary,—Agnes beholds a lady advancing rapidly down the narrow thoroughfare.

A feeling of disappointment seizes upon her: she sees that it is not Mrs. Mortimer—and something



tells her that Trevelyan would not employ another female emissary.

Then it strikes her that she ought to rejoice that no farther progress should be made in the young nobleman's suit during her father's absence; and she feels that she has done wrong even to remain standing in that spot under the influence of a contrary expectation and of a tender though dimly significant hope.

With a sigh, the beauteous creature is about to turn away and re-enter the cottage, when,—oh! wonder and amazement!—with renewed suspense and reviving hope, she hears herself called by her name—called, too, in the tenderest, most melting tones of a woman's voice.

"Agnes—dearest Agnes! Stay—oh! stay—if only for a few moments! Stay—I implore you—beloved girl: you know not who it is that thus addresses you!"

These words were uttered in a voice of warm and passionate affection—so that a deep and absorbing interest was at once created in the bosom of Agnes towards that lady of whose handsome countenance

she had now a full view, and the earnest, appealing expression of whose features gave additional import to her enthusiastic exclamations.

"Madam—I will stay—I will not depart immediately," faltered Agnes, forgetting her father's injunctions relative to the caution which she was to exercise in regard to strangers: "but how do you know who I am?—and who are you?"

"Oh! that she should ask me who I am!" cried the lady, clasping her hands together in deep anguish. "But how beautiful she is!" exclaimed the stranger, in an altered and rejoicing tone: "how faithful, too, is the portrait! Agnes—dearest Agnes—I have much to say to you—much to impart that you will be delighted to learn: but must we continue to discourse thus, with this barrier between us? Can you not come to me?—or will you permit me to come to you? I long—oh! how I long to embrace you, dear girl that you are; and though we are but a few feet apart—yet does this garden-boundary separate us most cruelly!"

"Madam—I know not how to answer you," murmured Agnes, strange feelings of mingled pleasure,

apprehension, and hope agitating in her heart, as if that heart were a well of deep, inexhaustible, and yet incomprehensible emotions. "Your words seem to move me more than I can explain—"

"Yes—Agnes—dear Agnes," ejaculated the lady, stretching out her arms in an appealing manner towards the maiden: "'tis the voice of nature that speaks within you! But you hesitate to trust yourself with me? Ah! doubtless you have been warned—doubtless you have been urged to act with caution—Oh! my God—that you should look with an eye of suspicion upon me!"

And with these words, which were uttered in a tone indicative of the most acute anguish, the lady burst into a flood of tears.

Agnes stood blanched, and trembling, and speechless,—having a deep conviction that the lady's fate was in some way linked with her own—yet not daring to form a conjecture as to the nature of the tie that thus mysteriously bound them together. A secret impulse appeared to urge her towards the weeping stranger; and she felt that were the arms again extended towards her, and were there no barrier in her way, she should precipitate herself upon that stranger's bosom, that they might mingle their tears together and interchange the sympathies that already drew them to each other.

"Agnes—dearest Agnes," exclaimed the lady, suddenly breaking silence and wiping away the traces of her grief,—speaking, too, in a voice of heart-touching appeal,—*"I implore you to come to me—or to show me how I may enter those precincts without being observed by the inmates of the dwelling! But, say—tell me,"* she added, a sudden thought striking her,—*"is he—your father—there?"*

"My father is in Paris," replied Agnes: "he—"

"Thank God!" ejaculated the stranger, with an enthusiasm that astonished and even startled the maiden. "But Mrs. Gifford—is she still alive?—is she still in attendance on you?"

"She is in the house at this moment," returned Agnes, more and more surprised at these questions—not only on account of their nature, which showed that the lady was acquainted with many circumstances regarding her condition; but also in consequence of the vehemence with which they were put.

"Then how can I join you in that garden?" demanded the lady, in a tone of bitter disappointment. "Oh! Agnes, you know not how ardent are the yearnings—how intense the longings that prompt me even to dash through this hedge and fold you to my bosom! Cruel girl—keep me not thus in an agony of suspense; but come—come to my arms—as if I were your mother!"

"My mother!" exclaimed Agnes, in a voice of mingled hope and amazement—while such indescribable emotions started into existence in her bosom, that she felt overpowered by their influence, and staggering back a few paces, would have fallen to the ground had she not leant against a tree for support.

"Agnes—Agnes!" cried the lady, imploringly: "give not way to thoughts that will deprive you of your presence of mind—for you need all your self-possession now! Agnes—dear Agnes—answer me—"

"Who are you? O heaven! such strange ideas—such wild hopes—such bewildering presentiments crowd upon my soul," exclaimed the beautiful maiden, "that I know not how to act nor what to conjecture!"

And, again approaching the hedge, she passed her

hand across her brow, throwing from her face the shower of curls that had fallen in disorder over that charming countenance—the luxuriant locks having been disturbed by the movement given to the neat little straw bonnet when she staggered against the tree.

"You ask me who I am," said the lady: "oh! pity my suspense—have mercy upon me—come to my arms—and I will tell you all."

"Stay there, madam—dear madam," cried Agnes, without another instant's hesitation—so earnest, so pathetic was that last appeal: "and I will join you at all risks!"

CHAPTER CLXXIII.

HOPES FULFILLED.

WITHOUT pausing to reflect upon the step which she was taking—forgetful of all the injunctions she had received from her father, and all the promises of prudence and caution which she had made to him,—obedient only to the irresistible impulse of her feelings—as if nature's voice rose dominant above a sire's mandates,—the Recluse of the Cottage disappeared from the view of the lady, who remained in the path outside the garden, a prey to the most torturing fear lest the young maiden should be intercepted by the inmates of the dwelling.

But Agnes was not compelled to pass through the house in order to gain egress from the premises. From the stable-yard a gate opened into the lane; and by this avenue did she proceed—so that there was no necessity to exercise any wariness or precaution. Had the contrary been the case—had she been compelled to pause in order to reflect how she was to escape the notice of the servants, her artlessness of character and purity of soul would have prompted her to wait and reflect whether she were acting in accordance with her father's counsels. She would then have flown straight to consult Mrs. Gifford; and the result would have been inimical to the hopes and wishes of the lady who was so anxiously expecting her in the lane.

But as nothing impeded the maiden's progress, nor forced her to stay her steps even for a single instant,—the gate being always left open during the day-time for the convenience of the gardeners, and these men being engaged in front of the house on the present occasion,—the current of her thoughts, impelling her towards the lady, received no hindrance—no check; and in a few moments Agnes was speeding along the lane, with a heart influenced by emotions of hope, curiosity, suspense, and wild aspiration.

For that word "Mother"—that dear, delightful word, which had so seldom fallen on her ears, and which in an instant excited so many pleasurable reflections—so many ineffable feelings in her soul,—that word which, as if with electric inspiration, had suddenly opened to her view an elysium of the affections which she had never known before, and which gave promises of felicity the holiest and the purest,—that word, so fraught with the tenderest sympathies to one who had hitherto lived in a semi-orphan state,—that word it was which exercised a magic influence upon the maiden—absorbed all other considerations—and rendered her impatient to hear more from the same lips whence this word had come.

And yet she could not have accounted, had she

paused to search, for the spring of the excitement that now ruled her actions. It was not that she cherished the conviction of finding a mother in the lady who was waiting to embrace her; but she did half suspect that such would be the case,—and she certainly hoped—oh! most fervently hoped that she was not destined to experience disappointment. The very artlessness of her disposition made her sanguine;—and under these influences did she hasten along.

The lady advanced to meet her;—and in a few moments they were clasped in each other's arms.

"My child—my dearest child!" murmured the fond mother, who had indeed recovered a daughter in Agnes Vernon.

"Oh! is it possible?" exclaimed the beautiful creature, in an ecstasy of joy: "is it possible that you are my parent?"

"I am, my beloved Agnes—I am: and heaven can attest that, though separated from thee since thine infancy, I have never ceased to think of thee—never ceased to love thee!"

A faintness now came upon Agnes;—and her mother felt that she was clinging the more firmly to her in a convulsive effort to prevent herself from falling.

"Lean on me, my child—here—let me sustain you, my darling Agnes!" cried the lady. "Oh! how happy am I at this moment—with thee in my arms! But—My God! she faints!"

And the maiden, overcome by her emotions, fell into a state of insensibility.

The lady carried her in her arms along the lane: great was the strength which now animated the mother who had just recovered a long-lost daughter;—and in a few minutes a hackney-coach, that was waiting higher up the avenue, received the precious burthen.

When Agnes came to herself, she started as if, on waking from a delicious dream, she feared that it might prove all a delusion: but when, by the rays of the setting sun which streamed through the open windows of the vehicle, she beheld the handsome, pleasing, and yet mournful countenance of her mother bending over her, a glow of joy suffused the charming creature's face—and, throwing her arms around her parent's neck, she exclaimed, "Oh! tell me that it is not a dream! assure me once more who you are!"

"I am your mother, Agnes dearest—your own fond and loving mother, who has languished after you for years, and who will never separate from you again, unless by your own consent, or through the stern decree of an iron tyranny! Yes, Agnes—I am your mother;—and, beautiful though you be, I may without vanity declare that the stamp of nature proclaims you to be my child?"

"Yes—and my own heart's emotions assure me that you are indeed my parent," said the lovely girl. "But you observed that we should not part without my consent. Oh! can you suppose, dear mother, that I should ever ask to leave you—ever seek to separate myself from you?"

"No, my child—I am sure that you will not!" exclaimed the lady. "At the same time, Agnes," she added, in a different and mournful tone, "it is my duty to inform you that if you choose to live with me, you must resign all hope of seeing your father again—at least for two years—"

"Oh! say not so!" ejaculated Agnes, bursting into tears. "Surely it must be with my father's

knowledge that you came to see me—that you are taking me away with you. And yet," she added, a sudden reminiscence flashing to her mind, and causing her to start painfully,—“and yet, I recollect now that I left the garden stealthily—that you urged me to come round to you in the lane, unperceived by the servants—that you knew not my father was in Paris. Oh! mother, mother,” cried the young girl, again interrupting herself, and speaking with a burst of anguish,—“what does all this mean? Whom am I to obey—you or my father?—for it is clear to me that in yielding deference to the counsel of the one, I must prove disobedient to the other!”

"Tranquillise yourself, dearest Agnes—tranquillise yourself, I implore you!" exclaimed the lady, straining the trembling—almost affrighted maiden to her breast.

"Ah! dearest mother, when I hear your voice and receive your kisses, I have no thought save for you," murmured the young girl. "Oh! and now your tears fall upon my cheek. Mother—dear mother—forgive me for what I said ere now—I will obey you—and you only. But do not—do not weep, my beloved parent!"

"May God Almighty bless you, Agnes!" fervently exclaimed the lady, her tears streaming in blinding torrents from her eyes.

"Oh! do not weep—I implore you!" cried Agnes, in a tone of the most tender affection. "Are you unhappy, dear mother? If so, tell me the cause of your sorrow!"

"I am both happy and unhappy, Agnes," was the response, almost choked with sobs. "I experience ineffable pleasure and acute pain, all at the same moment! But your words soothe me—your voice descends into my soul like sweet music—your caresses are as a balm to my bruised and weltering spirit!"

"Dear mother, let me embrace you closer still!" murmured Agnes, clinging to her parent in that narrow chaise as if there were an imminent danger of their immediate separation. "But wherefore are you happy and unhappy at the same time?"

"I am happy because I have this evening recovered you, and thus seen accomplished the hope of long, long years," returned the lady; "and I am unhappy because I fear that some untoward circumstance will part us again."

"Oh! what circumstance can part us, dear mother?" asked Agnes, her bosom filled with vague alarms. "May I not dwell with you, if I choose—and if you choose to have me with you?"

"Yes—oh! yes, Agnes," replied her mother, earnestly and in an impassioned tone. "But will you not pine—when the excitement of these new feelings shall have passed away,—will you not pine, I say, for your secluded cottage—your beautiful garden—and—and your father?" she added, her voice suddenly becoming low and tremulously plaintive.

"What is that lovely cottage—what are the choicest flowers of that garden, in comparison with thy love, my dearest—dearest mother?" exclaimed Agnes: "and, oh! if I must decide between you, on the one hand, and my father on the other—And yet he has been so kind—so very kind to me—that it goes to my very heart—"

"Agnes—Agnes—you love your father better than me!" exclaimed the mother, in a voice of the most piercing, rending anguish. "But it is natural—oh! it is natural—for you never knew me until now—at least not since your infancy! Yes, it is natural, I say! Oh! fool that I was to hope that

you could love me well enough to consent to dwell beneath my roof in future! No—no—it is impossible: I see it all, Agnes—you would be wretched—miserable, were you to part from your father! I will take you back to your cottage, then, my child—I will leave you there—and we must separate upon its threshold, never—never to meet again, perhaps, in this life!”

“No, dearest mother—speak not thus despairingly—or you will kill me—you will break my heart!” cried Agnes, her voice choking with sobs. “You are unhappy—and it is my duty to remain with you—Oh! and God forgive me for saying it, if it be a crime—but—but—it is also my wish!”

And with these words, the maiden again threw herself upon her mother’s bosom and wept plentifully, while her arms clasped that parent’s neck with almost convulsive violence—as if she feared to lose her.

“Now, Agnes, I am happy—oh! supremely happy!” exclaimed the fond woman. “You will remain with me—and I shall not again submit your feelings to a painful test by proposing the alternatives which have already rent your bosom. Listen, however, to me for a short space. I am a lonely and desolate woman, and have experienced a recent affliction of an almost overpowering nature. Indeed, I should have succumbed beneath its weight, had not accident—an accident of a most extraordinary character—last night revealed to me the place where you dwelt in such seclusion. Then I suddenly felt that I had something worth living for—and I came to you this evening, with the hope of seeing you,—yes—and also with the hope of inducing you to accompany me, that we might dwell together in future. For, oh! Agnes, you cannot divine how tender—how lasting—how invincible is the love of a mother for her child. Years and years have passed since I saw you; and I have pictured to myself my darling daughter growing up in beauty and in virtue—endowed with elegant accomplishments, and trained in all that she ought to learn or that would become her—save a knowledge of her mother! Now, my dearest Agnes, you repay me for that immense—that boundless love which I have ever cherished for you: now you reward me for the anxious years—the age of sorrow, as I may term the period which has elapsed, for me, between your infancy and the present time. Your father is rich—is possessed of many resources for recreation and pleasure in the world, which a woman cannot enjoy. He has many, many friends;—and, deeply though he loves you, he will not miss you so much as I have missed you, and should miss you still, were you now to be separated from me. It is, then, a mother who implores her daughter to give her a daughter’s love—to yield her a daughter’s affection—and perform towards her a daughter’s duty. All this, my Agnes, I see that you are prepared to accomplish—even at the sacrifice of your feelings in respect to your sire. Moreover, that sire has been blessed with your smiles ever since your birth—or at least has had you under his guardianship and control: and now—oh! now, am I asking too much when I beseech you to devote a few years of love to me,—to me who am your mother—who am unhappy—and who, without you, should now feel so lonely and desolate that the sooner the cold grave were to close over me, the better!”

“I will not leave you—I will die sooner!” mur-

mured Agnes, her eyes streaming and her bosom heaving with convulsive sobs. “But you will not leave my father—nor that kind and good Mrs. Gifford—in ignorance of what has become of me?”

“I could not be guilty of such cruelty, my darling child,” responded the mother. “And now,” she continued, after a rapid glance from the window of the vehicle, which was at this moment passing by Kennington Common,—“and now listen again to what I have to say to you. My own house is in the northern suburb of London; and it is possible that Mrs. Gifford may be acquainted with the place of my abode. I know not whether she be; and I should conceive that she is *not*:—nevertheless, there *is* the possibility, as I observed—and, in that case, she would adopt measures to tear you from my arms. For this night, then, you must consent to remain at the house of some ladies of my acquaintance. They will take care of you—they will be rejoiced to have you with them, though only for a few hours; and by to-morrow evening I shall have a dwelling fitted up for our reception. It is my intention to give up my villa which I now possess—and I know of a sweet cottage, with a beautiful garden, in the neighbourhood of Bayswater, which I shall hire at once. All these arrangements can be effected in the course of to-morrow—for by means of money incredible things are accomplished in London.”

“Be it as you say, my dear mother,” observed Agnes. “But you will remain with me this night?—you will not leave me with strangers?” she exclaimed anxiously.

“Certainly, my child, if you wish it, I will stay with you,” returned her mother. “Listen, however, to me once again. The friends in whose care I propose to place you, are two elderly ladies, who will receive you as the daughter of one whom they sincerely love—for they are as devoted to me as if I were a near and dear relative, and are acquainted with much that concerns me. You will be as safe in their charge as if I myself were with you: for, remember,—by to-morrow night I must have a home—a good home—prepared for my Agnes,—and it will occupy me until a late hour *this* night to make the arrangements for the removal of all my furniture and other property in the morning. In addition to all this, Agnes, I should be compelled in any case to return to my house this evening,—as there may be a communication of importance for me there,—a communication from a generous friend—noble by nature as well as by name—and who is interesting himself for me and for *another*—”

“Say no more, my dearest parent,” interrupted Agnes. “I am ready to obey you in all things and to follow your counsel: but promise to return and take me away with you as early as you can to-morrow,” she added imploringly.

“Fear not, my darling Agnes,” replied the mother: “I shall be as anxious to embrace you to-morrow as you possibly can be to see me.”

While this conversation was in progress between the two ladies in the hackney-coach, the sun had set—twilight had become absorbed in the shades of night—but the vehicle was now proceeding along the Blackfriars-road, which was brilliant with the gas-lamps stretching away in two approximating lines, and ultimately becoming confounded together on the arching bridge in the distance.

At length the hackney-coach passed out of the Blackfriars-road into Stamford-street; and Agnes,

looking from the left-hand window, saw that the three first houses on that side of the way, towards which her eyes were turned, were in a condition so ruinous and dismantled as to strike a chill to her susceptible heart. But the unpleasant sensation almost instantly vanished, when the coach drew up at the door of a house in excellent repair, and presenting, in outward appearance, a remarkable contrast to those dilapidated buildings.

Here Agnes and her mother alighted; and the young maiden no longer thought of the sinister-looking ruins adjoining, when she found herself in a comfortable parlour, where both herself and parent received a cordial welcome from two elderly ladies whose benevolent countenances, agreeable manners, and kind speech were calculated to inspire confidence at once.

The name of these maiden sisters was Theobald; and they were indeed possessed of excellent dispositions and endowed with the most amiable qualities. The moment that Agnes' mother entered the room, they rose to embrace her with the warmth of an unfeigned friendship; and even before the young maiden was introduced to them, they exclaimed, as if suddenly struck by the same sentiment, "Ah! this is the dear girl whom you have so long pined to recover? We need not wait to be told that she is your daughter: the likeness between you proclaims the fact!"

And then they embraced Agnes in her turn.

The young lady's mother drew the elder Miss Theobald aside, and said, "I propose to leave my beloved child with you for this night. Circumstances compel me to return home without delay. I have decided upon taking your beautiful little villa at Bayswater, and shall remove all my furniture thither the first thing in the morning. It is fortunate that the sweet dwelling should have been thus in want of a tenant at this moment."

"I am delighted for your sake, my dear friend," responded Miss Theobald, "that the villa is unoccupied. We will send one of our servants at day-break to make all the necessary preparations for your reception. Oh! how sincerely—how deeply do I congratulate you upon having recovered your long-lost daughter!" added the kind-hearted woman, in a tone of profound feeling.

"It is indeed a source of indescribable solace to my wounded spirit, as you, my dear friend, may well conceive—for you are acquainted with the principal events of my chequered existence. But I must now depart: it is growing late—and ere I seek my couch this night, I shall have arranged everything for my removal to Bayswater to-morrow."

With these words the lady turned towards Agnes, saying, "My dearest child, I leave you in the care of these excellent friends, whom it is only necessary to know in order to love."

"I feel that I do already love them, my dear mother," responded the young maiden, as she threw herself into her parent's arms.

"Farewell—till to-morrow, my sweet Agnes: soon after mid-day you may expect me—and the Miss Theobalds can tell you that the new home to which you are then to accompany me, will leave you nothing to regret in reference to your own little secluded cottage and beautiful garden in Surrey."

"Wherever I may dwell with you, dear mother—there shall I enjoy contentment," answered Agnes,

tenderly embracing her whom in two short hours she had thus learnt to love with an affection that seemed to have existed for years.

"Adieu, my darling child," murmured the fond mother; and she then took her departure.

Agnes listened until the sounds of the retreating wheels were no longer audible—or rather, until they were absorbed in the din of the numerous vehicles passing in the immediate neighbourhood of the house: and then a sudden chill seized upon her heart—a damp fell upon her spirits,—her feelings, powerfully excited by the incidents of the day, experienced a rapid revulsion—and, unable to control her emotions, she burst into tears.

CHAPTER CLXXIV.

A NIGHT OF TERRORS.

THE two ladies hastened to console—or, speaking with greater accuracy, endeavoured to console the weeping girl. But, although she knew how friendly disposed they were towards her—although she felt the full extent of their kindness, and even reproached herself with her inability to yield to its soothing influence,—yet it seemed as if the departure of her mother had left her more alone in the world than ever she was before.

"Dry those tears, my sweet Agnes," said the elder Miss Theobald, pressing the maiden's delicate white hand with cordiality and tenderness.

"Oh! do not give way to a sorrow for which you have no real cause," urged the younger of the two ladies. "A few hours will soon pass, my dear child, and your fond parent will return."

But Agnes, though acknowledging by her gestures the kindness of the sisters, could not subdue her grief; and her sobbing became more convulsive.

For a tide of conflicting and painful reflections rushed in upon her soul. She remembered all her father's goodness towards her—the strong injunctions he had given her not to hold intercourse with any one who was not the bearer of a letter from him—and the grief that he would experience when he heard of her departure. She thought, likewise, of the terror and dismay which must even already reign at the cottage on account of her mysterious absence: she beheld, in imagination, the excellent-hearted Mrs. Gifford and the good-natured Jane inconsolable at her loss;—and, apart from all these ideas, she now felt certain misgivings arise in her bosom relative to the step she had taken. Vainly did she endeavour to persuade herself that, acting by the counsel and in obedience to the prayers of her mother, she could not have done wrong: a secret voice appeared to reproach her—an unknown tongue seemed to whisper ominous things in her ears. Terror gained upon her; and, under its influence, her grief became less violent. But her thoughts grew confused—there was a hurry in her brain: she felt as if she had just awakened from a wild and painful dream, and was still unable to collect her scattered ideas;—and still amidst that confusion, flashed, with vivid brightness to her memory, the warning which her sire had so emphatically given to her respecting the snares that were set by the wicked to entrap the artless and the innocent. At length, overcome by the terror which thus rapidly acquired a complete empire over her soul, and forgetting all that was re-assuring and

consolatory in her present position, Agnes Vernon fell upon her knees before the two amazed ladies, exclaiming, as she extended her clasped hands wildly towards them, "Take me home again to my cottage—take me home again, I implore you!"

"My dearest child," said the elder Miss Theobald, accompanying her soothing words with the tenderest caresses; "what do you fear?—wherefore do you wish to leave us? Are we not your mother's friends?—and can you not persuade yourself to look upon us in the same light?"

"Oh! yes, madam—I know—I feel that you are my friend—that you wish me well!" cried Agnes, her apprehensions dissipating, but only to allow scope for her anguish to burst forth again.

"Why, then, do you thus give way to your grief?" asked Miss Theobald, raising the young maiden gently, and as gently leading her to a seat.

"I cannot explain my sensations," sobbed the poor girl: "and yet I feel very—very unhappy."

"You have doubtless been much excited this evening, my love," was the reply: "but a good night's rest will tranquillise you. And remember—you are beneath a friendly roof, and where harm cannot reach you."

"But I tremble lest I have done wrong, madam," exclaimed Agnes. "How is it that my father ordains one thing, and my mother counsels another? Oh! I am bewildered with misgivings—I know not what to think, nor how to act!"

"Are you not pleased at having at length embraced a mother?" said the younger Miss Theobald, in a tone of gentle reproach.

"Yes—oh! yes!" ejaculated Agnes, fervently: then, in a mournful voice, she observed, "But I have fled—surroptiously fled from the home provided for me by a fond and trusting father!"

The two ladies fully comprehended the nature of the conflicting thoughts that were agitating in the breast of Agnes Vernon; and they exchanged rapid glances of mingled sorrow and apprehension. They saw that on one side was a suddenly awakened and ardent love for a mother; and that on the other was a sense of the deference and obedience, as well as of the gratitude, due to an affectionate father. They were, therefore, filled with regret that family circumstances should have placed that pure, artless, and innocent girl in a position which compelled her to balance between the two; and, although they would have moved heaven and earth to induce her to decide in favour of the maternal parent, they recognised the difficulty of the task, and entertained the deepest alarm for its results.

"To-morrow evening, long before this hour, my dear Agnes," said the elder of the ladies, "you will be comfortably settled in your new home. The villa which your mother intends to inhabit at Bayswater, belongs to my sister and myself. It is a neat little dwelling—neither too much secluded, nor too near to the neighbouring houses; and a large, well-cultivated, and delightful garden is attached to it. Then, my dear child, reflect—remember, that you will possess a constant, a devoted, and a loving companion in your mother: you will no longer pass many, many hours—indeed, the greater portion of your time—in solitude and loneliness, nor be thrown upon the incompatible society of servants, who, however good in heart and well-intentioned, are not such associates as you would select of your own free will."

"Ah! madam—your words console me," said

Agnes, endeavouring to stifle her sobs. "But how happens it that you should be acquainted with my late mode of life?"

"I did but guess what that mode of life must have been," returned Miss Theobald; "and I see that I was not far wrong. I knew that your father did not—could not dwell with you entirely—that he could only be a visitor at your place of abode, wherever it might be—and, therefore, I naturally conjectured that you were thrown almost completely upon your own resources."

"And can you tell me, madam," asked Miss Vernon, ingenuously, as the thought suddenly struck her,—“can you tell me how it is that my father should wish me to dwell under his guardianship only, and my mother wishes me to rely solely upon her? Or, indeed,” she added, after a few moments' pause, "I should rather inquire the reason which prevents my parents from living together beneath the same roof, and having me with them? for, according to all the books I have ever read—"

"Ah! my dear Agnes," interrupted the elder sister, "you would not seek to penetrate into those mysteries which so unhappily belong to the destinies of your parents?"

"Oh! no—no—if it be improper for a child to ask an explanation of such secrets!" exclaimed Miss Vernon, the natural purity of her soul instantly absorbing the sentiment of curiosity that had prompted her queries. "And now let me implore your pardon for having testified so much excitement—"

"It was to be expected, dear child," said Miss Theobald; "and you have no pardon to solicit. We are delighted to perceive that you have at length recovered some degree of calmness. Rest assured that you will be happy in the society of your mother, whom we have known for years—yes—many, many years, and whom we love as much as if she were a near relative. You will be surprised to learn, Agnes, that when you were a babe, we often fondled you in our arms. Yes: you may regard me with surprise—but it is nevertheless the fact, that my sister and myself have frequently—very frequently nursed and dandled you for hours together."

"Oh! I was wrong to exhibit so much mistrust and want of confidence in you just now!" exclaimed Agnes, her affectionate soul being deeply touched by assurances so well calculated to move her, and which were indeed strictly consonant with truth.

"Think not of what has gone by, my dear child," said the younger sister. "We make all possible allowances for the excited state of your mind; and we sincerely hope, as we believe, that happiness awaits you. But it is growing late; and you doubtless stand in need of refreshment ere you retire to rest."

Then, without waiting for an answer, she rang the bell; and the servant was ordered to bring in the supper-tray. Agnes was in no humour to partake of the meal: indeed, she was in that state of mind when the individual rather loathes the idea of eating, through a total suspension of the appetite. But so delicate were the attentions of the kind-hearted sisters, and so persevering were they in their endeavours to render their guest as comfortable as possible, that Agnes sat down to table; and, if she scarcely ate anything, yet her spirits revived somewhat from the social nature of the evening repast.

It was a little after eleven when the Misses Theobald conducted the young lady to the bedchamber which had been prepared for her reception; and, having embraced her affectionately, the good sisters left her, as they hoped, to the enjoyment of that repose of which they knew she must stand much in need.

The moment she found herself alone, the maiden felt unpleasant thoughts returning to her mind; and, in order to escape from them, if possible, she began to lay aside her apparel with unwonted haste. Everything necessary for her toilette had been provided; and the chamber, which was at the back of the house and on the second floor, was elegantly furnished—having an air of comfort that would have been duly appreciated by one in a more settled state of mind than was the amiable girl at the time. In a few minutes she retired to rest; and, contrary to her expectation, sleep soon fell upon her eye-lids—for she was worn out and exhausted by the exciting incidents of the day.

Her dreams were not, however, of a tranquillising description.

In the first place, she fancied that she was roving in her garden, and that she beheld Lord William Trevelyan approaching down the lane. In a few moments he stood by her side; though how he passed the verdant boundary was not quite clear to her. She did not retreat,—yet she felt that she ought to retire: but her feet were rivetted to the ground;—and when he took her hand, the same unknown and invisible influence which nailed her to the spot, forbade her to withdraw that hand which trembled in his own. Then she imagined that the young nobleman began to address her in a style similar to the contents of his letter: she cast down her eyes—she felt herself blushing—and, though she knew that she ought to retreat, she nevertheless listened with emotions of pleasure never experienced before. He pressed her to be allowed to visit her again; and she was raising her eyes bashfully towards his countenance, to read his sincerity in his looks, ere she murmured the affirmative reply that already trembled upon her tongue, when she was suddenly shocked to perceive a marvellous and signal change taking place in him. His face grew wrinkled—the handsome features became distorted and frightful—his clothes took another appearance—and, as she gazed upon him in speechless wonder and alarm, she saw standing in his place a hideous old woman, whom she at length recognised as Mrs. Mortimer. Agnes strove to cry out—but could not: a spell was upon her lips;—and the harridan's eyes glared upon her with savage malignity. The maiden felt herself sinking in terror to the ground—when the whole scene experienced a sudden variation; and she was now in the parlour of the cottage, with her father seated by her side.

Neither was this second dream of a tranquillising description.

Agnes fancied that her sire was angry with her—that he uttered reproaches for a disobedience of which she had been guilty. At first she could not comprehend the nature of the offence that had entailed upon her this vituperation, and rendered her father's manner so unusually severe towards her—but at last it flashed to her mind that she had been incautious in receiving at the cottage evil-intentioned visitors;—and then she suddenly found her father engaged in a violent dispute with Mrs. Mor-

timer, whose countenance seemed more than ever hideous and revolting. How this dispute originated, or how Mrs. Mortimer had got into the room, Agnes knew not: there she however was—and the quarrel waxed warmer and warmer. At length the old woman took her departure: but ere the door closed behind her, she turned on Agnes a look of such fiend-like malignity, that a shriek would have expressed the young maiden's affright, had not her lips been mysteriously sealed. When the harridan had disappeared, Mr. Vernon renewed his reproaches; and Agnes fancied that, on falling on her knees in the presence of her sire to demand pardon, he spurned her from him—upbraided her with her disobedience and ingratitude—and warned her, in a tone of solemnly prophetic meaning, that her readiness to repose confidence in strangers would bring down some terrible calamity on her head. She was about to promise never more to prove guilty of the disobedience which had elicited all these reproaches and produced all that unwonted harshness on her father's part, when a third person appeared on the scene;—and this third person was her mother!

But this new dream which now visited the sleeping maiden, was not of a tranquillising description.

She fancied that an earnest appeal was now made to her on either side, placing her in the difficult and most distressing condition of a child who had to decide as to which of her parents she would cling to, and which abandon. Here was her father, reminding her of all he had done for her: there was her mother, proclaiming herself to be unhappy and to need the society and solace of her daughter. On her right hand stood the sire whom she had always known: on her left was the maternal parent whom she had never known before. The countenance of the former expressed misgivings amounting almost to despair: that of the latter was bathed in tears, and indicative of all the agonies of a cruel suspense. Agnes felt that her heart was rent by this scene; and yet it appeared to her that she was bound to decide, and that promptly, in one way or the other. She looked towards her father; and he held out his arms to receive her—his countenance assuming an expression so profoundly wretched that it seemed to say, "If I lose you, I lose all I love or care for on earth." She turned towards her mother, in order to breathe a last farewell, for that she must accompany her father,—when she beheld her maternal parent on her knees, and extending her clasped hands imploringly, while the pale but beautiful face indicated that life or death was in the decision which was about to be pronounced. Agnes could not resist this earnest—silently eloquent appeal on the part of a mother who had proclaimed herself to be unhappy; and the maiden fancied that she threw herself into that mother's arms. A cry of misery burst from her father's lips; and Agnes awoke with a wild start,—awoke, to feel her entire frame quaking convulsively, and her heart palpitating with alarming violence.

For a few moments—nay, for nearly a minute, she lay stretched upon her back, endeavouring to compel her thoughts to settle themselves in their proper places, so that she might attain the assurance whether she had just beheld realities, or had only been the victim of distressing dreams;—and when she was enabled to arrive at the latter con-

clusion, she started up in her bed, exclaiming, "Nevertheless, this is more than I can endure!"

Then came the consciousness of where she was, and why she was there,—how she had fled from the home that her father had provided for her, and in spite of all his solemn injunctions and prudential warnings,—how her mother had left her in a strange place, and with persons who were strangers to her,—and how Mrs. Gifford would be certain to send to Paris without delay and communicate the afflicting tidings to Mr. Vernon.

The maiden's brain reeled, as these thoughts flashed through it;—and at this moment, when her senses appeared to be leaving her, the clock of Christ Church, in the Blackfriars-road, proclaimed the hour of one!

The sound came booming—rolling—vibrating through the air, like a solemn warning. At least, so it seemed to the disordered fancy of Agnes Vernon;—and, with feelings worked up to an intolerable pitch, she leapt from her couch.

To obtain a light was an easy matter—for the necessary materials were at hand; and when the flame burst from the tip of the lucifer match, Agnes cast a hurried and affrighted glance around, as if she dreaded to meet some hideous countenance or horrible form in the chamber. Not that she was naturally timid: no—far from it;—her very innocence and purity rendered her courageous on ordinary occasions. But she was now under the influence of emotions powerfully wrung—of feelings strained to an unusual tension;—and she had no control over her imagination, which was disordered and excited.

One idea dominated all the rest. This was to escape from the house—to escape, at any hazard and at all risks. Not for worlds, she thought, could she return to that bed where such distressing visions had rent her soul;—and she could not pass the rest of the night alone, and in a strange place. No: she must return to the cottage—retrace her way to the home which her father had provided for her—and endeavour to reach that friendly threshold in time to prevent Mrs. Gifford from transmitting to her sire the news of her disobedience.

But her mother! Oh! she should see that parent again—she would explain everything—and perhaps arrangements might be made to suit the views and accomplish the happiness of all! In the mean time, however, she must escape—she must return home,—she could not endure the idea of remaining another hour—no—nor even a minute longer than was necessary—in that stranger-dwelling!

With lightning speed did all these thoughts,—or rather glimpses of thoughts—for they were too brief, too fleetingly vivid, to deserve the name of reflections,—pass through the maiden's mind, as she threw on her apparel with a congenial haste; and in three minutes she was dressed. Her bonnet was in the parlour below: but that she could take on her way out of the house—or she cared not if she did not find it at all. She would escape in any case, and at all events; and if she could not find a vehicle to convey her home—she would walk, although she might have to ask her way at every step. For Agnes had worked herself up to a pitch of desperation: a fearful panic was upon her;—she knew not, neither did she pause to ask in her own soul, why she longed so ardently to fly from that house:—

an irresistible and almost incomprehensible influence urged her on—and the hurry of her actions was in accordance with the hurry of her brain.

Her hair was flowing over her shoulders: she just waited a moment—a single moment, to fasten it up in a large knot behind; and then, taking the light in her hand, she stole noiselessly down the stairs.

A profound silence—a silence which her footsteps disturbed not—reigned throughout the house.

All, save the affrighted—half-maddened girl, slept.

She gained the hall—she endeavoured to enter the parlour to procure her bonnet: but the door was closed—and she now remembered that the elder Miss Theobald had taken the key with her when they had all quitted that room for the night.

But we have already said that Agnes cared not for the bonnet;—and without bestowing a second thought on the matter, she approached the front-door. Alas! there was a more serious disappointment still—the key of that door had likewise been taken up stairs.

An expression of bitter vexation passed over the pale countenance of the maiden—an expression more bitter than that beautiful countenance had ever before worn: but, in another instant, it was succeeded by something like a gleam of hope and joy,—for Agnes bethought her that there was a yard at the back of the house—she had seen it, in the moonlight, from her bed-room window—and there might be a means of egress in that direction.

Cautiously descending the stairs leading into the kitchens, which were below the level of the street, she hastened to the back-door, which, to her joy, proved only to be bolted.

Oh! now she would escape—she would escape, even if she were forced to climb a wall and enter the enclosure belonging to a neighbouring house: for, with the excitement occasioned by her present proceedings, the panic influence which urged her on acquired fresh power every moment.

Extinguishing the light, she left the candlestick in the house, and then emerged into the yard.

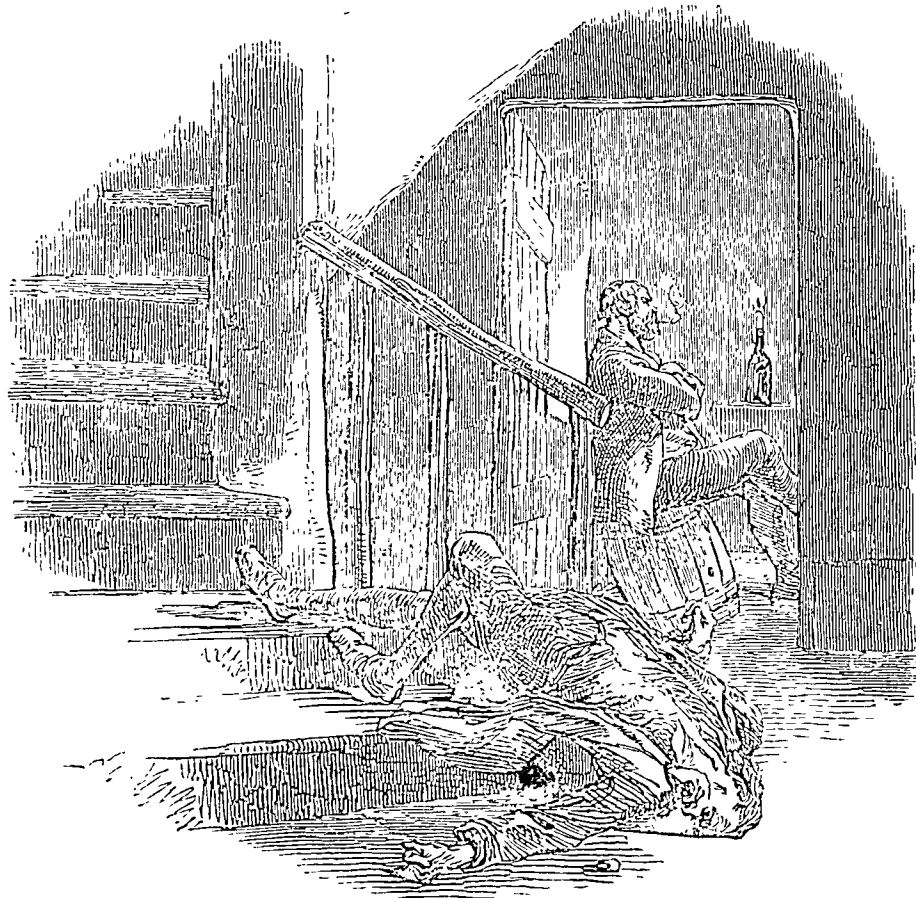
The fresh air, as it fanned her face, seemed to breathe whispering promises of freedom, and gave her renewed courage.

The moon was shining gloriously; and as she cast a glance of rapid survey around, she beheld the backs of the dilapidated houses the fronts of which had struck her with such sinister effect when she first entered Stamford Street, in the hackney-coach, in the evening.

There was no mode of egress from the yard save by scaling the boundary walls, which were low on either side.

Not an instant did Agnes hesitate: the fittings of a water-butt served as a ladder for her delicate feet;—and, behold! the sylph-like form of the maiden passes nimbly and lightly over the wall, into the yard belonging to the ruined house next door: for it strikes her that egress by means of an uninhabited building must be certain beyond all risk or doubt.

The moon-light streams, with silvery rays, upon the sombre walls—the dark window-frames, with the blackened fragments of glass remaining in them—the back-door hanging crazily and loosely on its hinges—and the rust-eaten bars of the back-kitchen window. The yard is overgrown with rank grass, reaching above the ankles; and the ground is rugged



and uneven—the chances of tripping being moreover multiplied by the brick-bats and the broken bottles scattered about.

The ruined aspect of the house and the long-neglected condition of the yard, or small garden as it once was, behind the building, constituted a scene of desolation, and conveyed an impression of utter loneliness to the mind of the young lady that made her shrink back for a moment as she placed her hand on the rusty latch of the crazy door leading into the lower premises. And seemed she not the sprite of some maiden who had been foully dealt with in that gloomy, tomb-like place, and whose unquiet ghost came to haunt the scene where her blood had been ruthlessly spilt and her mortal remains lay concealed in unconsecrated ground? Yes—such she indeed appeared, with her ashy pale face—her white dress, rendered whiter still by the moonbeams that played upon it—and her long dark hair which, having become loosened in the act of scaling the wall, now flowed all wildly and dishevelled over her shoulders!

We said that she hesitated for a moment to push her way into the dark and ruined building, wrapped

as it was in sepulchral silence: but the dominant influence which had hitherto impelled her, assorted its empire once again; and, thrusting open the door, which was by no means a difficult matter—she entered the dilapidated house.

A chill struck to her heart and a vague terror seized upon her, as she now plunged, as it were, out of the pure moonlight into the utter darkness of those premises: but, subduing her fears, she advanced a few paces, with her arms extended so as to grope for the stairs.

Her right hand encountered the bannisters, which were loose and crazy, and raised a rattling noise as she grasped them: no longer alarmed, however, but feeling that the means of escape were gained, she was about to ascend the steps, when a door suddenly opened immediately in front of her—a light appeared—and the rays of the candle thus abruptly thrust forth revealed a countenance so hideous—so monster-like, that for a few moments Agnes stood transfixed in speechless horror—stupidified—paralysed—motionless as a marble statue.

And glaring with horror also, were the eyeballs whose rivetted looks met her own: then a loud,

hoarse, and affrighted voice exclaimed, "The ghost! the ghost!"—and the light, dropping suddenly on the ground, was immediately extinguished.

A piercing shriek burst from the lips of Agnes; and she fell senseless at the foot of the stairs.

CHAPTER CLXXV.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE IN STAMFORD STREET.

WE must now carry our narrative backward for a few hours, in order to explain the incident which has just been described.

At the corner of Stamford Street and the Blackfriars Road, there are three houses in a most dismantled and dilapidated condition. They seem to have been ravaged by fire; but time and neglect have in reality produced that deplorable appearance. The walls are blackened with accumulated dirt; and the state of the windows bears unequivocal evidence to the fact that every pane has been broken, individually and separately, by stones flung from the streets by vagabond boys or other mischievous persons. The fragments of glass that remain, seem as if the material never could have been transparent, but had even in its manufacture been stained with an inky dye; and the shutters wherewith the casements are closed inside, are equally blackened, as if by a smoke as dense as that which proceeds from the funnel of a steam-packet or the chimney of a factory.

For the last twenty years have these three houses been thus left to fall into ruin: for the fifth part of a century has the work of dilapidation and decay been going on! That they were once habited is evident from the fact that the blinds, pulled up round their rollers, still remain—but so begrimed with black dust and dirt that it is scarcely possible to believe they were ever white. The cords used to pull them down, with the tassels at the end, are likewise still there, and totally discoloured also. Very mournful is the aspect of those ruined tenements, with these indications that they once were comfortable dwellings,—that cheerful fires once burnt in the grates—that lights streamed from the casements in years gone by—and that the walls echoed to the gay pealing laughter of merry children!

Desolate—desolate, indeed, are the three houses,—a disfigurement to the entire vicinity, and having an appearance well calculated to throw a damp upon the spirits even of the most strong-minded of the neighbours.

There is something picturesque in the aspect which ruins in the open country—perhaps on the summit of a hill—assume from gradual decay; because there the ivy grows upon the walls, and the naked hideousness of dilapidation is concealed by the invasion of a wilderness of shrubs and sweets. But when the golden rays of a summer sun pour upon the blackened walls and shattered casements of houses in the midst of a populous city,—houses which have dwelling-places adjoining them and all around,—the effect is sombre, sad, and sinister in the extreme.

Such is the impression produced by those three houses in Stamford-street. Not that the street itself is otherwise cheerful in aspect: on the contrary, the entire thoroughfare stretching between the Blackfriars and Waterloo Roads, is gloomy and inhospitable in aspect. The exterior of the houses has a dinginess of wall and a darkness of win-

dow that are unrelieved by the aristocratic grandeur and the richness of curtains inside, which characterise the rows of smoke-dyed dwellings in more fashionable quarters.

The inhabitants of Stamford Street are amazingly prone to the letting of lodgings, when they can find any persons willing to take them. But that such pliant and easily-persuaded tenants are rare in that quarter, is proved to demonstration by the numbers of cards and bills in the windows announcing furnished apartments to let.

It is a curious study, and one that affords matter for speculation, to examine the cards and bills thus displayed. Some are written in a neat feminine hand, so small that the passer-by must protrude his head far over the railings to enable his vision to decipher the delicate announcements: others are penned in a bold, coarse hand—and, in them, the chances are ten to one that the word *let* is spelt with a double t;—while others, again, are printed in the types which the experienced eye has no difficulty in tracing to Peel's famed establishment in the New Cut.

More than half of Stamford Street constantly appears to let; and, from all accounts, landlords experience no trifling difficulty in collecting the rents from the occupants of their houses. If you pass along Stamford Street just before quarter-day, and at a very early hour in the morning, or at a late hour in the night, you will be sure to perceive several vans loading with furniture; for the habit of "moon-shining it," or flitting surreptitiously, is unfortunately of frequent occurrence in that district.

But these are not the only indications that the affairs of the inhabitants and lodgers in Stamford Street are far from being in the most blooming condition: the fact may also be gathered from the careworn countenance of the tax-gatherer as he leaves a fresh notice at every door, and from the common occurrence of the water being cut off. Nor less does the Poor Rates' collector feel his task to be a most unpleasant one; while the tradesmen in the Blackfriars Road wonder, as they look over their ledgers, what the deuce Stamford Street is coming to. Visitors are frequently answered from the area—an unmistakeable precaution against the intrusion of sheriff's officers; and even when the butcher delivers in his meat or the baker his bread at the front door, the chain is in many instances kept up.

Such is the prevalent state of affairs in the long thoroughfare which we have thus briefly described: but it is with the dilapidated houses—or rather with one of them—that we have now to occupy ourselves.

As soon as it was dusk, two men emerged from the miserable rookery constituted by the district of Broad Wall; and, entering Stamford Street, they proceeded stealthily along until they reached the ruined house which was next to the dwelling of the Misses Theobald. One of the men—a tall, stout, ruffian-like fellow, whom we shall presently describe more particularly—took a key from his pocket and opened the door of the dilapidated tenement, into which he hastily entered, his companion closely following him. We should however observe that this ingress was effected at a moment when no other persons were near; and that the door was opened and shut in a noiseless manner, so that no sound might reach the ears of the occupants of the adjacent dwelling.

"Now give us your hand, old feller," said the ruffian-like individual, when they were safe inside the passage: "because the stairs is summut broke away, and the bannisters isn't to be trusted. Lord! how you tremble! Why—what the hell are you afraid on?"

"Nothing—nothing, my good friend," was the answer, delivered in a nervous tone: "only—it's—it's—so—very—very—dark."

"Dark!" cried the ruffian, with a hoarse laugh: "why, it very often is dark in a house at night-time, and where there's no candle alight. But p'raps you're afraid of ghostes," he continued, as he dragged rather than led the nervous old man down the crazy, rotting stairs towards the lower region of the place: "and if so, you're in the right quarters to see a speret—for they do say the young gal which was murdered here, walks in her shroud;—but, for my part, I never see her—and I han't got no fear of that sort."

By the time these words were uttered, in a tone of coarse jocularity, the ruffian had conducted his companion to the bottom of the stairs; and, halting at that point, he struck a lucifer-match against the wall, and lighted a piece of candle which he took from his pocket.

He then led the way into the front kitchen of the house, bidding the old man close the door behind him.

The place was black all over with accumulated dust and dirt: the ceiling appeared as if it had been originally painted a sable hue; and the floor, broken in several parts, conveyed the same impression. The shelves above the dresser were in a most dilapidated condition; and the dense cob-webs clung to them, as well as to the corners of the ceiling, like masses of rotten rags. The shutters were closed; and over their entire surface were pasted sheets of thick brown paper—evidently to prevent the light of candles from peeping through their chinks and being noticed in the street. There was an old rickety table in the middle of the kitchen: there were likewise two chairs, which, being made of a tough wood, had withstood the ravages of time; and an empty beer-barrel was placed upright near the table, as if it occasionally served as a third seat.

The ruffian stuck the candle in the neck of a bottle; and, opening one of the dresser-drawers, he drew forth a bottle and a couple of small tumblers:—then, placing himself on the barrel, he proceeded in a leisurely manner to light his pipe, while the old man—his companion—sank, nervous and trembling, into one of the Windsor-chairs.

The reader has no doubt already guessed that these two individuals were Vitriol Bob and Torrens;—and, if so, the surmise is correct.

The latter person needs no description; but the former character must be more elaborately dealt with on the present occasion. He was indeed, as Jack Rily had represented him, one of the greatest miscreants that ever disgraced humanity,—not only in reality, but also in personal appearance. Of tall stature, athletic frame, and muscular build, he possessed vast physical strength. He was about thirty-six years of age: his countenance was naturally ugly even to repulsiveness—but huge black whiskers meeting under his chin, rendered it positively ferocious;—and the small, dark, reptile-like eyes glared from beneath thick, overhanging brows. His lips were remarkably coarse and of a livid hue; and his nose, broken in the middle, had a deep indentation,

giving an appearance of death's-head flatness to the broad countenance. His apparel consisted of a seedy suit of black—a hat with very wide brims, bent even to slouching—and a pair of heavy Wellington boots; and in his hand he carried a thick stick with a huge knob at one end and a massive ferule at the other. This was his "life-preserver;" but he seldom had occasion to use it—for his proceedings were usually of the savage and diabolical nature described by the Doctor, and whence he derived the appellation of *Vitriol Bob*.

This terrible individual was well known to the police: but those functionaries trembled at the idea of molesting him. They would have experienced no such dread had his defensive weapons been confined to life-preservers or pistols: but there was something so horrible in the thought of having a bottle of burning, blinding fluid broken over the countenance, that the officers shuddered at the bare idea of tackling Vitriol Bob. Thus, whenever information was given of some nefarious deed which he had attempted or perpetrated, the police took very good care to search for him where they knew he was not to be found; and if they even met him in one of the bye-streets or obscure alleys on the Surrey side of the metropolis—the quarter which he chiefly honoured with his presence—they were suddenly seized with an inclination to look stedfastly into a picture-shop, or gaze up abstractedly at the sky, until he had passed.

Vitriol Bob knew that he was an object of terror to the functionaries of justice in general: but he was also well aware that there were exceptions to the rule, and that amongst so large a body as the police-force, some few individuals would pounce upon him at all risks. In fact, the impunity he enjoyed was not so completely assured as to render precaution unnecessary; and there was moreover such a thing as being taken by surprise. For these reasons he accordingly made use of one of the "haunted houses,"—for so they were denominated,—as a place of concealment whenever he had committed a deed calculated to lead to the institution of unpleasant enquiries.

Such was the individual whom we now find in company with Torrens; and the circumstance that threw them together in the first instance, will presently transpire through the medium of the conversation that took place as soon as they were seated in the kitchen of the haunted house.

"Well, here we are safe at last, old feller," cried Vitriol Bob, puffing deliberately at his pipe, as if he savoured deliciously the soothing influences of the tobacco. "By goles! it is one of the best larks I ever was engaged in. Such a lot of tin, and so easily got!"

"Two thousand seven hundred a piece—eh?" said Torrens, eyeing his companion with nervous suspense, as if he were eager to assure himself that a fair and equitable division of the booty would take place.

"Hah!" observed the ruffian, in a complacent manner, as he filled the two tumblers with brandy from the black bottle: "drink!"—and he emptied one of the glasses at a draught, just as if it were a mere thimble-full of the fiery liquid. "It was a good job, old feller," he continued, after a short pause, "that you fell in with such a prime chap as I am—or rayther, it was fortuit that I lodged in the same house, and as I came in heard you moaning and groaning away in your cellar. It was also lucky

that you let me worm out of you all that had happened—although you was precious chary of making a confidant of me. You remember that I couldn't believe you at fust—I looked on you as a perfect madman. Thinks I to myself, '*There's a precious lu-natick just 'scaped out of Bedlam:*' for how was I to fancy that you'd raly been robbed of such an amount, living in a cellar as you was?"

"But you believed me at last—you saw that it was all true and correct," exclaimed Torrens, perceiving that it suited the man's humour to talk on the subject.

"Well, I did," returned Vitriol Bob: "and now," he added, tapping his breeches pockets significantly, "I have got plenty of proof that you didn't tell no lies. But, Lord bless ye! you could have done nothink without me: you would have sat down quietly under your loss. But I told you that I'd find the old woman out, if so be she was in London at all; and so I did. The description you gave me of her was not to be mistaken—specially by a genelman of eggs-sperience like myself. I went about all over London, looking for her; and then, behold ye! arter all she's living within a stone's throw of us, as one may say. By goles! I never shall forget how my heart jumped in my buzzim when I clapped eyes on her yesterday, as she came out of the coffee-house: but you don't know how I found out that she actually lived there?"

"No—I do not," said Torrens, observing that his companion bent upon him a look of mysterious importance, as much as to invite a query that should furnish him with the opportunity of giving an explanation relative to the point alluded to. "How did it happen, then?"

"Why, when I see the old woman come out of the coffee-house, I went straight away to my blowen—that's Pig-faced Polly, as she's called—and I tells her to go to the place, take tea and toast, and wait till she found out whether the old woman lived there, or not. But I orders Polly not to make inquiries, for fear of eggs-citing suspicion. Well, my gal did as I told her—and waited, and waited a good long time; and when she'd had three teas and four or five buttered toastesses, she see the old woman come in, and she hears the landlady come out and say, '*Here's your key, Mrs. Mortimer.*' Then up goes Mrs. Mortimer—for such her name seems to be—to her room; and Pig-faced Poll returns to me with the hintelligence. I knowed that my game was now safe enough; and it was me which dewised the plan of our going as officers with a search-warrant, when we'd watched the old woman leave the coffee-house this morning."

"Yes—yes: I know that you did it all," said Torrens, terribly alarmed lest he who experienced the lion's share of the trouble, should now claim the lion's share of the booty. "But how long shall we be obliged to remain here? I am in a hurry to get away—with my share—my fair share of my own money—"

"Your own money, indeed!" ejaculated Vitriol Bob, with a chuckling laugh. "Was it your'n when Mother Mortimer had it safe in her own box? And I should just like to know how you fust come by it? Not honestly, I'll swear, old feller. Such a seedy-looking cove, living in such a way as you was, couldn't have got near upon six thousand pound by wot's called legitimate means. But that's neether here nor there: I don't care two figs how you got the tin—and if I ask no questions, I shan't

have no lies told me. Von thing is wery certain—that I've got it now."

"But—but—you surely—my dear friend—you—" stammered Torrens, absolutely aghast at the idea of still remaining a beggar.

"Come, let's have no more of this drivelling nonsense," interrupted Vitriol Bob, in a tone of unmitigated contempt: then, as he refilled and relighted his pipe, he observed, "Why, you have been in a fidget and a stew all day, ever since we secured the swag at the coffee-house. Don't you see, my dear feller, that people in our situations must act with somethink like common prudence? The old woman may rouse hell's delight about her loss; and that was why I thought we'd better keep ourselves scarce for a time. So I made you stay close with me at the flash lodging-ken in the Mint all the arternoon till it was dusk; and then I brought you here. And here," added Vitriol Bob, "we are safe enow: 'cos only Pig-faced Poll, Jack Rily, and one or two others of my pals knows anythink about this place being my haunt when I'm afeard of getting into trouble;—and there's no danger of them splitting on us. So far from that, the Pig-faced will be sure to come here presently, when she finds I don't visit her own quarters this evening; and she'll bring a basket of prog along with her—so that we shall have a jolly good supper in due time. Drink, old feller!"

Thus speaking, the ruffian refilled his own tumbler, and pushed the brandy bottle across the dirty table to Torrens, who did not, however, touch it—for his glass was only half emptied; and he experienced such lively sensations of alarm, that he felt as if his brain were reeling and his intellects were leaving him.

There he was—a feeble, helpless, weak old man, entirely in the power of an individual whom he knew to be of the most desperate character, but with whom he had joined in companionship only through the hope of recovering at least one-half of that treasure to gain which, in the first instance, he had imbrued his hands in blood. There he was—alone with that miscreant, in a place the aspect of which was sufficient to fill his attenuated soul with the gloomiest thoughts and the most melancholy forebodings,—alone with a demon in human shape, in a ruined and desolate tenement, to augment the cheerless influence of which superstition had lent its aid,—alone with a very fiend, in a haunt the ominous features of which were dimly shadowed forth and rendered more hideous by the dull, glimmering light of the solitary candle with its long wick and its sickly flame.

"Well—what are you thinking of?—and why don't you drink?" were the words which, suddenly falling on the old man's ears after a pause, awoke him as it were from a lethargy—a lethargy, however, in which the mind had been painfully active, though the body was motionless—petrified!

"I—I—was wondering how long we should have to remain here," stammered Torrens, starting as if shaken by a strong spasm or moved by an electric shock.

"I asked you the question just now—and—and you did not give me a reply."

"Well—it all depends, my fine feller," answered Vitriol Bob. "Three or four days, perhaps—"

"Three or four days!" almost shrieked Torrens. "I shall die if I linger so long in this horrible place!"

"Die, indeed!" ejaculated the ruffian, in a contemptuous tone. "Why, Lord bless you—I've stayed here for three weeks at a time, afore now—without ever budging out. Not be able to linger, as you call it, in this comfortable crib—smoke and drink all day long—or drink only, if you don't like smoking—and sleep in one of them Windsor-cheers as cozie as a bug in a rug! Besides, won't you have me for a companion—"

"No—no: I can not—will not endure it!" exclaimed Torrens, starting up from his chair,—his countenance hideous with its workings—his nerves strung to the most painful state of tension—and a thousand frightful thoughts rushing in, with the speed and fury of a torrent, upon his appalled soul.

"Hold your cursed jaw, you fool!" growled Vitriol Bob, in a tone of sudden rage: "you will be heard in the street—and—"

"I care not!" screamed Torrens, louder than before. "Give me my share of the money—let me depart—"

"Be quiet, I say!" spoke the ruffian, in a still more irritated voice, while he sprang from his seat on the barrel; "or I shall do you a mischief."

"I care not!" again cried Torrens—and again his tone grew still more piercing and shriekingly hysterical; for he was wrought up to a state of utter despair. "Give me my money, I say—give me—"

"Fool—be still!" exclaimed Vitriol Bob, rushing round the table, and grasping the old man by the throat.

But Torrens, inspired with a sudden strength that astonished the ruffian, broke away from his gripe, and rushed towards the door, crying "Murder—murder!"

"Damnation!" thundered Bob; and bounding after him, he sprang upon the old man with the fury and the force of a tiger.

"Murder!" again yelled the affrighted, desperate Torrens: but in another instant he was dashed violently against the wall.

A moan succeeded his agonising cry—and he fell heavily upon the floor. Vitriol Bob then jumped upon him—and the attenuated form of the wretched old man writhed beneath the heavy feet of the murderous ruffian.

There was a faint and stifling appeal for "Mercy! mercy!"—but the miscreant silenced it with a ferocious stamp of his heel on the mouth of the dying man;—and in a few moments all was over!

Vitriol Bob was now alone, in the gloomy, cheerless place, with the crushed and disfigured corpse of him whom he had literally trampled to death.

But scarcely was the deed accomplished, when a noise, as of gravel thrown from the street against the kitchen window, fell upon the ears of the murderer, whose countenance instantly expanded into an expression of grim delight at the well-known signal.

"Here's Pig-faced Poll!" he exclaimed hastily: and then he paused to listen again.

At the expiration of about a minute the signal was repeated; and Vitriol Bob, no longer harbouring the slightest doubt, hurried up the stairs to open the street-door

CHAPTER CLXXVI.

SCENES IN THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

AT five-and-twenty minutes past ten, on this eventful night, Mrs. Mortimer entered the narrow lane leading from the Blackfriars Road into Collingwood Street.

We have already stated that she had persuaded herself into a belief of Jack Rily's fidelity towards his partner or pal in any enterprise: nevertheless, she could not help wishing that the business in hand was over—and she mentally exclaimed more than once, as she threaded the lane, "Would that to-morrow morning were come!" But she had such a powerful inducement to proceed in the affair at any risk, that the idea of retreating was discarded each time it faintly suggested itself; and when Jack Rily made his appearance, punctually to an instant, she felt her courage worked up to such a pitch that it was difficult to decide whether it arose from entire confidence or utter desperation.

"So, here you are, my fine old tiger-cat," said the doctor, grasping her hand, with a force that might have been very friendly, but was not the less painful on that account. "I thought you would not flinch: indeed, I made sure you'd come to the scratch."

"What have I to be afraid of—since you are so sure of being able to overpower the wretch whom you call Vitriol Bob!" demanded Mrs. Mortimer, in a firm tone. "I have already told you that I will undertake to manage the villain Torrens."

"I long to see you grapple with him," returned the doctor. "But we must not waste time in idle observations. Listen, my good lady, to our plan of proceeding. Vitriol Bob has a female acquaintance called Molly Calvert—or, in more familiar terms, Pig-faced Poll. This young woman knows his haunt—knows also the signals necessary to induce him to open the door. Besides, whenever he's missing, she goes straight there, with a basket of provisions and what not—because she naturally suspects that he has done something queer and has found it convenient to make himself scarce. Well—you must be Pig-faced Poll for the nonce—"

"I understand you," interrupted Mrs. Mortimer. "It is for me to give the signal and obtain admission—"

"Just so, my dear madam—and for us both—because if ever Molly Calvert and I go there together, it's always the young woman herself who whispers a word of assurance to Vitriol Bob when he opens the door."

"But suppose that the young woman you speak of, has already repaired to the robber's haunt—suppose that she is already with him—"

"Now don't take Jack Rily for an arrant fool!" said the ruffian; and, dark though it were in the narrow lane where this colloquy took place, Mrs. Mortimer could see the huge white teeth of her companion gleaming through the opening of his horrid hare-lip. "I know what I am about," he continued. "Lord bless you! do you think I have been idle since I saw you this morning? No such thing! I went straight away to Molly Calvert, and made her send out for a bottle of gin. She is uncommonly fond of blue ruin—particularly when she drinks at another person's expense; and as she drank this afternoon at mine, she did not spare it. In a word, I left her in such a helpless state of intoxication, that if she moves off her bed before two or three o'clock in the

morning, then tell Jack Rily he is a fool and incapable of managing any business whatsoever."

"I give you all possible credit for sagacity and forethought," said Mrs. Mortimer, purposely flattering the ruffian. "Well, then, the young woman you speak of is placed in a condition which will render her incapable of interfering with our proceedings; and I must personate her for a moment or two, just to obtain admission into the house."

"Personate her is scarcely the term, my dear madam," answered Jack Rily: "because if Vitriol Bob only caught a glimpse of you by the neighbouring lamp-light, he would know duced well that it was not the Pig-faced who sought admission. But it is a mere matter of *vocal stratagem*, if you understand me."

"Speak plainly and briefly," said Mrs. Mortimer, with some degree of sharpness in her tone.

"I will put it all into a nut-shell," responded Jack Rily: then, with rapid utterance but impressive enunciation, he continued:—"The first signal is made by throwing a little gravel at a certain window; but, as that might be accidental, it is necessary to repeat it at the expiration of a minute or so. In a few seconds afterwards Vitriol Bob will open the front door as far as the chain inside will permit—and that is barely an inch: you must then immediately whisper, '*It's me and the Doctor*,' and the door will be instantly opened wide, Bob standing behind it. You pass rapidly in—and I'm at your heels; and as the passage and the stairs leading down to the kitchen are as dark as pitch, he won't observe that it is not Molly Calvert whom he has admitted into the house. Now, mind, you must walk straight along the passage, and gain the stairs—and all this without any hesitation, but with an apparent knowledge of the premises. Go rapidly down the stairs, and you will then see a light straight before you. That will be in the front kitchen—and there you are certain to find Torrens. Spring upon him—tackle him desperately: there will not be a minute to lose—because the moment you appear in his presence, he will recognise you—he will utter a cry—and that must be the signal for the fight. Vitriol Bob will be just behind me—and—"

"You will assail him at the instant that I pounce upon Torrens?" said the old woman, with a bitter malignity in her tone, as she already gloated in anticipation upon the vengeance which she hoped to wreak upon her husband.

"Perform your part, ma'am—do all I have told you," observed Jack Rily; "and leave the rest to me. And now are you ready?"

"Quite," was the reply. "In which direction do we proceed?"

"The house is in Stamford Street," answered the Doctor. "But you had now better follow me at a short distance."

With these words, the man turned round, and proceeded along the narrow lane into the Blackfriars Road, up which he wended his way until he reached the corner of Stamford Street, where he looked back to satisfy himself that Mrs. Mortimer was in his track. He beheld her, by the light of the lamps, at a short distance behind; and, turning into Stamford Street, he was duly followed by her. Halting for a moment, he stooped down, gathered a few small pebbles from the side of the road joining the kerb-stone, and threw them at a window in the area of the dilapidated house which stood third from the corner. He then walked on a few paces,

picked up some more little stones and hard crusted dirt, and turning back, met Mrs. Mortimer just opposite the house alluded to. The second volley was discharged at the window; and then they both stationed themselves at the door of the tenement, Mrs. Mortimer being placed in the most convenient position to give an answer to any summons that might issue from within.

The door was opened an inch or two; and the old woman, feigning the tone of a younger female, whispered hastily, "It's me and the Doctor." Thereupon the chain fell inside, and the door was opened half-way, Vitriol Bob standing behind it.

Mrs. Mortimer passed hastily in, followed by Jack Rily; and Vitriol Bob, closing the door noiselessly, readjusted the chain.

"Take care, Poll," he said, in a hoarse and low tone: "don't be in such a devil of a hurry to get down them stairs—'cos there's somethink in the door-way of the kitchen that you might stumble over."

"What is it, Bob?" demanded Jack Rily, hastily; for inasmuch as the real truth flashed to his mind in an instant, he feared lest Mrs. Mortimer should likewise suspect the fact, and, being thrown off her guard, betray herself by some sudden exclamation.

"What is it?—why, a stiff 'un," responded Vitriol Bob, with a chuckling laugh which sounded horribly in the midst of the total darkness that prevailed in the passage and on the stairs. "I 'spose Poll has let you into the business, since you've come along with her," continued the man; "and though I don't see what right she had to tell you anything about it, I ain't sorry you have come—'cos you can help me to bury the old feller, and you shall have your reglars."

Mrs. Mortimer now fully comprehended that Torrens had been murdered; and an appalling dread seized upon her—for she felt that she was completely in the power of two diabolical ruffians, who were as capable of assassinating her as one had already been to make away with her husband.

A faintness came over her—and she staggered against the wall for support; when Jack Rily, in answer to Vitriol Bob's last observations, said, "Oh! Poll didn't tell me a single word about any business that you had in hand: but as I met her quite by accident and suspected she was coming here, I forced myself, as one may say, upon her company—for I thought you'd be glad to see an old pal, if you was under a cloud."

These words instantaneously re-assured Mrs. Mortimer. She comprehended that her confederate had uttered them, too, for that purpose; and it flashed to her mind that he only wanted to get Vitriol Bob down into the lower part of the house in order to make an attack upon him. She accordingly recovered her self-possession, and rapidly groped her way to the bottom of the stairs, when a feeble light, glimmering from the kitchen, showed her a sinister object lying just inside the threshold.

The blood ran cold in her veins: for, much as she had hated Torrens—anxiously as she had longed to be avenged upon him—profoundly as she abhorred the tie that to some degree had linked their fates, she nevertheless felt horrified at the conviction that the murdered man lay there—in her very path!

Nevertheless, she still maintained her courage as well as she could, and, hastily passing the lifeless form, entered the cheerless, gloomy kitchen, which

Indeed appeared to be the proper haunt for such a miscreant as Vitriol Bob, and the fitting scene for such a tragedy as the one which had been enacted there that night!

In the middle of the kitchen she paused, and listened with breathless suspense.

Jack Rily had just reached the bottom of the stairs leading thither: Vitriol Bob had only just begun to descend them.

"Well, here is indeed a stiff 'un," exclaimed the former, stopping short in the interval between the foot of the steps and the threshold of the kitchen. "What had he done to you, Bob?—and when did this happen?"

"Wait a moment—and I'll tell you all about it," was the reply. "I hope Poll has brought lots of grub—for the business hasn't taken away my appetite."

"She has got a basket with her," said Jack Rily.

At this moment Vitriol Bob reached the bottom of the stairs, when the Doctor sprang upon him with the sudden violence of a savage monster; and the murderer was thrown back on the steps.

"Treachery!" he exclaimed, in a tone resembling the subdued roar of a wild beast irritated by its keeper; and the two men were locked in a close embrace—a deadly struggle immediately commencing.

A mortal terror struck to the heart of Mrs. Mortimer, who knew full well that if her confederate should succumb, her own life would not be worth a moment's purchase; and for upwards of a minute she stood rivetted to the spot, listening to the sounds of the conflict which she could not see.

Suddenly it struck her that she might aid her companion; and, taking from beneath her shawl a coil of rope with which she had intended to bind Torrens, whom she had made certain of subduing, she rushed to the scene of the struggle.

The gleam of light that reached that place, was sufficient, feeble though it were, to show her that Vitriol Bob had the advantage. He had succeeded in getting uppermost; and Jack Rily was struggling desperately underneath the man whose strength he had miscalculated. The conflict was thus progressing, accompanied by deep, low, but bitter execrations, when Mrs. Mortimer, whom a sense of danger suddenly restored to complete self-possession, threw a noose round Vitriol Bob's neck, and instantly drew it tight,—exclaiming, as she performed this rapid and well-executed feat, "Courage, Rily,—courage: grasp him firmly—loosen not your hold!"

"Damnation!" ejaculated Vitriol Bob, the moment he felt the cord upon his neck and heard a strange female voice,—at the same time making a desperate—nay, almost superhuman effort to tear himself away from his foe and turn round on his new enemy.

But the women drew the cord as tight as she could, and a sense of faintness came suddenly over the murderer,—so that Jack Rily was in another instant enabled to get uppermost once more.

"Tie his legs, old lady—and then we've nothing more to fear!" cried he, as he placed one knee on Vitriol Bob's chest, and held the vanquished ruffian's wrists firmly with the iron grasp of his sinewy hands. "Now, keep quiet, old fellow—or you'll be strangled," he continued, addressing himself to the wretch whose eyes glared savagely up at him even amidst the obscurity of the place: "It's useless to

resist—you are my prisoner,—and if it's necessary to make you safer still, I'll draw my clasp-knife across your throat—which I should be sorry to do, on account of old acquaintanceship."

"What—what have I done to you—Jack—to—to deserve this?" gasped Vitriol Bob, half strangled with the noose, which, however, was now somewhat relaxed in consequence of Mrs. Mortimer being occupied in tying the other end of the rope round his ankles—a task which she performed with amazing skill and rapidity, and which, in consequence of Rily's menaces, the vanquished one did not think it prudent to resist.

"I'll tell you presently what you have done, Bob," said the Doctor, in answer to the other's query. "Now that you are bound neck and heels, you are not very formidable: nevertheless, I must just make your arms secure—and then we'll hold a parley. Here, old lady—put your hand in the pocket on the right side of my coat, and give me out the cord you'll find there. That's right! Come—be steady, Bob—or I shall do you a mischief yet."

The conqueror then proceeded to bind the wrists of the vanquished; and when this was done, he said, "Now, my fine fellow, I will just carry you into the kitchen; and if there is any brandy there, you shall have a drop to wash the dust out of your mouth."

With these words, Jack Rily raised Vitriol Bob in his arms, and bore him into the kitchen, where he placed him on a chair; and the murderer now perceived for the first time that the female who had mainly contributed to his defeat, was the one whom himself and Torrens had robbed.

Jack Rily, on examining the bottle which he found upon the table, discovered that there was plenty of liquor left in it; and, filling a tumbler, he placed it to the lips of Vitriol Bob, who greedily swallowed the contents—for his throat was indeed parched with the dust raised by the late struggle and the semi-strangulation he had endured.

"Now, my hyena friend—my tiger-cat accomplice," said the Doctor, turning towards Mrs. Mortimer, who, exhausted in mind and body, had sunk into a chair, "you will likewise partake of the stimulant. And mark you, madam," he added, with deep emphasis, and in a tone that was particularly reassuring to the old woman, "I owe you my life—and, whatever my intentions concerning you originally were, I can only now say that I'll do all that's fair and honourable towards you. But enough of that: so, drink!"

Mrs. Mortimer, greatly delighted at the result of the night's expedition, smiled as cordially as her repulsive countenance would permit; but Jack Rily surveyed her with much admiration, for she reminded him at the moment of a pleased hyena after a copious meal. His satisfaction was enhanced by the readiness with which she tossed off the burning fluid; and, taking his turn with the brandy, he drank to her health.

"Now to business once more!" he exclaimed, as he set the glass upon the table. "And first, where's the money, Bob?" he demanded turning towards the helpless ruffian, who sat moody and scowling in the chair in which he had been placed.

"I suppose you mean to let me have my reglars, Jack?" he said, in a tone which he endeavoured to render as conciliatory and agreeable as possible.

"Not a blessed halfpenny, Bob—and that's flat," responded the Doctor, as he plunged his hands into

the pockets of his prisoner. "Ah! here's the swag—and a precious heavy parcel it is too!" he exclaimed, after a few moments' pause, and in a joyous tone. "My dear madam," continued the villain, handing the brown paper packet to Mrs. Mortimer, "count it over—see that it's right—and divide its contents equally. You may as well be satisfied at once that I mean to do what is right towards you—and then, may be, you will think seriously of the propriety of our clubbing our fortunes together, and setting up as a gentleman and lady living on our means—that is, you know, as Mr. and Mrs. Rily."

All the latter portion of this long sentence was lost—entirely lost upon Mrs. Mortimer: for the moment that her hands grasped the brown paper parcel—that parcel which was so significantly weighty—her whole attention was absorbed in the task of examining its contents. She placed it upon the table; and, by the dim flickering light of the miserable candle, she counted the yellow pieces—turned over the soiled notes—and carefully reckoned up the whole,—exclaiming, at the completion of the business, "It is all right, save in respect to a single sovereign, which I dare say the rogues changed and spent directly. Here is your share, Mr. Rily—and I thank you much for your valuable aid."

"You are the handsomest ogress I ever saw, when you appear gloating over the recovered gold," said the Doctor. "If I could afford it, I would actually and positively give you my portion just to have the pleasure of contemplating your physiognomy while you fingered it. But perhaps we may have all things in common yet between you and me."

Thus speaking, the ruffian secured his share of the spoil about his person—an example that was immediately followed by Mrs. Mortimer in respect to her division;—and all the while Vitriol Bob sat looking on with a countenance of the most demoniac ferocity. It was evident that, could the wretch release himself from his bonds, his rage would endow him with a strength calculated to give matters quite another turn: but he was helpless—powerless,—and this consciousness of his enthralled predicament only rendered his hatred the more savage against his successful enemies, and made his longings for revenge the more eager and also the more torturing on account of their unavailing intensity.

"I will now tell you, Bob," said Jack Rily, turning towards him, "why I have played you this trick—and you will acknowledge that it is only tit for tat. You remember the swell's crib we broke into at Peckham? Well—you found a bag containing a hundred and twenty sovereigns, in a drawer—and you never mentioned a word about it when we came to divide the plunder."

"It's a lie—a damned lie!" ejaculated the villain, ferociously.

"Say that again," cried the Doctor, his hare-lip becoming absolutely white with rage, while the scar upon his cheek grew crimson,—“and I will cut your throat from ear to ear. How could I invent such a tale? But I saw the advertisement in the papers about the robbery—I read that a bag containing a hundred and twenty pounds in gold was abstracted from a chest of drawers—and I well remembered that you searched those drawers, and afterwards assured me there was nothing in them worth taking. I did not tell you that I had thus become aware of your treachery, because I resolved

to be revenged some day or other. That day has now arrived—and you have the consolation of knowing that you have lost thousands in consequence of your beggarly meanness respecting a paltry sixty sovereigns, which was my share of the sum you kept back."

"Well—sposing it is all as you say, Jack," exclaimed Vitriol Bob, assuming a humble and indeed abject tone,—“ain't you more than even with me to-night? and won't you let me have my reglars? We shall then be good friends again."

"I do not mean to give you one farthing of my money—and I know this old lady won't," responded the Doctor. "As to our being friends again, I care not whether we become so, or whether we continue enemies. You can't do me so much harm as I can you, Bob," added Rily, in an impressive manner, and without a particle of his usual coarse jocularity: for you have to-night done a deed that, if known, would send you to the scaffold."

A deadly pallor passed over the countenance of the murderer; and he writhed in his chair with mingled rage and terror.

"Now, my old hyena," exclaimed the doctor, turning towards Mrs. Mortimer, "I told you that you should have a good opportunity of seeing Vitriol Bob in all his hideousness. Which do you think is the ugliest of the two—he or me?"

And he grinned so horribly with his hare-lip and his gleaming tooth, that the old woman was for an instant appalled by the fiendish, malignant joy that caused his countenance thus to assume so frightful an expression.

"Well—you don't like to pass an opinion upon the matter," he said, with a chuckling laugh: "may be you think I am the ugliest of the two, and that it would hurt my feelings to tell me so. Lord bless you, my dear madam—a right down savage, ferocious, revolting ugliness is a splendid subject for admiration to my mind. The uglier people are—provided it's the right sort of ugliness—the handsomer they are in my eyes. This may seem paradoxical—but it's the truth; and it's on that principle I am ready to marry you to-morrow, if you'll have me. However—think upon it: there's no hurry for your decision, my dear creature—pardon me for being so familiar. And now I may as well tell you that it was not my original intention to let you have one penny piece of all that swag," he continued, after a few moments' pause. "I had purposed to make use of you in obtaining it—and then self-appropriate it; because I didn't look upon you in the light of a pal with whom it was necessary to keep faith. The moment, however, that you interfered in the struggle just now, the case became suddenly altered: you saved my life—and I wouldn't harm a hair of your head for all the world. So you are quite welcome to take your departure at once if you will: but I should esteem it a mark of confidence if you'd remain here with me a few hours longer—and I'll tell you why."

"Show me a good reason, and I shall not object," remarked Mrs. Mortimer, knowing that the man, in spite of his conciliatory observations, had the power to enforce, if he chose, what he seemed to ask as a favour.

"I will explain myself," resumed Jack Rily: then glancing towards Vitriol Bob, he said, "Our friend here must remain in that condition until I can send Pig-faced Poll to release him from his bonds. It would not be worth while to risk another conflict



by taking on ourselves the part of liberators. His young woman shall therefore be entrusted with that agreeable duty: but as she is drunk in bed——"

Vitriol Bob uttered a sound resembling the savage but subdued growl of a wild beast.

"As she is drunk in bed," repeated Jack Rily, with a chuckle, "she won't be fit to undertake the task until it's pretty near daylight; and it would not be safe to leave the poor devil alone here for so many hours. I don't seek his death; but he might fall off his chair, tumble flat on his face, and not be able to right himself—for it's by no means an easy thing to shift one's position when bound neck and heels like that. So remain with him I must and will. His company will not, however, prove the most agreeable after all that has occurred betwixt us; and now you can guess why I ask you as a favour to stay with me—say till two o'clock, when we will take our departure and send Poll Calvert, who will be sufficiently sober by that time, to cut his cords."

"I consent to remain here until two o'clock," said Mrs. Mortimer: "only——"

And she glanced, with shuddering aversion, towards the door.

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"Ah! I understand you, my dear tiger-cat," exclaimed Jack Rily: "you don't admire the presence of the stiff 'un there. Lord bless you! if you'd only been my wife when I was a doctor, you would have become familiar enough with articles of that kind—aye, and have thought nothing of shaking hands with a resurrection man. But it's all habit; and so, since you would feel more comfortable if that bundle over there was moved, I'll just drag it into the back kitchen—and our friend here will doubtless amuse himself by burying it to-morrow night."

Having thus delivered himself with characteristic levity, the Doctor rose from the barrel whereon he had been seated, and taking up the candle, proceeded to transfer the dead body of Torrens from the threshold of the door into the back kitchen.

Mrs. Mortimer was now left in the company of the murderer, and in total darkness; and though she knew that he was bound beyond a chance of self-release, yet a cold shudder passed over her frame, as she thought of what would be the consequences, were it possible for him to cast off the strong cords that restrained him.

Scarcely had this reflection entered her mind, when a voice—stealing, as it were, like the hiss of

an invisible serpent through the utter darkness of the place—smote upon her ear.

"Madam—Mrs. Mortimer—loosen the cord—and I will give you half of what I shall then take from that villain Rily!" were the earnest, hastily uttered words that were thus suddenly whispered by the murderer.

The old woman was so startled that she could make no reply; and in another moment the light reappeared.

She mechanically cast her eyes towards Vitriol Bob; and the returning glimmer fell upon a countenance infuriate with rage, disappointment, and renewed spite;—but she did not think it worth while to mention to the Doctor the treacherous proposal that had been made to her during his temporary absence.

"I have put the corpse in the back kitchen," said Rily, resuming his seat on the barrel: then, after a few moments' pause, he observed, "This is the second murder that has been committed in this house."

"The second!" exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer, suddenly animated with a feeling of morbid curiosity.

"Yes—the second," repeated Rily. "What I did you never hear how these three houses came to be shut up, and why they are supposed to be haunted?"

"Never," answered the old woman, her manner convincing the garrulous Mr. John Rily that she had no objection to be enlightened on the subject.

"Well—as it can't be more than half-past eleven o'clock, and we have two hours and a half to pass away, according to agreement, in this place," resumed the Doctor, "I don't mind telling you the whole story. Our friend Bob here has heard it often enough, I dare say: but he will himself admit that it bears telling over and over again."

Jack Rily paused for a few moments, and then commenced the promised narrative, which we shall, however, put into our own language, the semi-jocular and flippant style of the Doctor not being quite suited for so serious a history.

CHAPTER CLXXVII.

HISTORY OF THE HAUNTED HOUSES IN STAMFORD STREET.

TWENTY-FIVE years ago there were not three nicer looking houses in Stamford Street than those which are now so dilapidated and so wretched in appearance both outside and internally. The corner dwelling was inhabited by an old gentleman and his son. Their name was Mitchell; and a handsomer youth than Leonard, who at that period had just completed his twentieth year, was seldom to be met with. But it was not only on account of his prepossessing person, elegant manners, and great talents, that he was a general favourite: it was likewise in consequence of his admirable behaviour towards his father. Mr. Mitchell was for many years a partner in an eminent mercantile firm; but the sudden death of a beloved wife, who had long been suffering with a disease of the heart, and who one evening fell a corpse at her husband's feet after having appeared gay and cheerful a few minutes previously, produced such an effect upon him that he was thrown on a sick bed, whence he arose at the expiration of several months—palsied in all his limbs! Although he still retained possession of his

intellect, yet his spirit appeared to be completely broken, and his energies were crushed. An arrangement was accordingly effected, by virtue of which he withdrew from the firm on condition of receiving four hundred pounds a-year for the remainder of his life. These incidents occurred during Leonard's seventeenth year; and the affectionate youth immediately devoted himself to the duty of rendering his afflicted sire's existence as pleasing—or rather, as little burthensome as possible. His attentions were unremitting, and yet so delicately administered that the old man was not suffered to feel how completely dependent he was, for solace and comfort, on his only child. When the weather was fine, Leonard invariably had some excuse to induce his father to go out for a walk; and as he supported the arm of that tottering, feeble, trembling parent, he conversed in a gay and unrestrained manner, conjuring up those topics which he knew to be agreeable to the invalid, and never—never exhibiting the least impatience at being thus chained as it were to the side of the sufferer. Of an evening, the young man would read aloud those works which best suited his father's taste: or he would sit for hours playing at chess—a game of which Mr. Mitchell was particularly fond. When invited to a party, Leonard would at first promise to attend, so that his father might not perceive that he remained away entirely on his account: but the youth was always sure to have a convenient head-ache or to sprain his ankle, or adopt some other ingenious and equally venial little device, in order to have an apology for staying at home. Now and then his father would see through his motive, and insist upon him keeping his engagement,—in which case Leonard was always sure to leave long before the breaking-up of the party; and, on his return home, he would creep noiselessly to his father's chamber to assure himself, ere he proceeded to his own, that the old man was comfortable and wanted for nothing. In a word, the devotion of this youth to his afflicted sire was such that all who knew him beheld him with mingled admiration and respect: and even the giddiest and most thoughtless young men of his acquaintance could not bring themselves to joke or jeer him for that conduct which, in any other, they would have looked upon as a steadiness and sedateness carried to an extreme.

Next door to the Mitchells—that is to say, in the central of the three houses to which this narrative relates—dwelt Mr. Pomfret, who, by the secession of the paralysed old gentleman, had become the head of the firm, the business premises of which were in the City. Mr. Pomfret was likewise a widower, and likewise possessed an only child, Ellen Pomfret was a year younger than Leonard; and she was as beautiful as he was handsome. They had been acquainted from childhood; and the affection which in its origin was such as exists between a brother and a sister, by natural degrees ripened into a devoted and profoundly-rooted love. In the estimation of all who know them, there was a remarkable fitness in the union of this admirable pair: their style of beauty—their dispositions—their manners—their acquirements, were of a nature to adapt them for each other. They were both tall, slight, and gracefully formed: Ellen's hair was of a rich brown, scarcely a shade deeper than that of Leonard;—their foreheads were high and intellectual;—their eyes were of deep blue—

less more melting and tender than his, which were animated with the fire of a noble and generous spirit;—and never did man nor woman possess finer teeth than theirs. Both were fond of music and drawing: both were imbued with deep religious feelings, sincere and even enthusiastic—but utterly devoid of bigotry and uncharitableness;—and both loved virtue for its own sake. Faith with them was a delight and an inspiration encouraging fond hopes in respect to this world and confidence in the next,—a religion that knew naught of ascetic gloom, but that seemed to trace life's pathway amidst love, and perfume, and flowers!

Mrs. Pomfret had died when Ellen was about fourteen; and for the two following years the maiden was blessed with the companionship and counsels of a kind aunt, who, immediately after the decease of her sister, took up her abode in the house. But death snatched her away to the tomb shortly after the sixteenth birth-day of her niece, who was thus left alone as it were with her father. Mr. Pomfret, though a kind and well-meaning man originally, was not a prudent one. He had an over-weening confidence in his commercial abilities and financial foresight; and he was thus led into speculations from which his friends, had he condescended to consult them, would have dissuaded him. Many of these speculations he undertook on his own private account, and independently of the firm of which, as above described, he became the head; and his numerous affairs accordingly kept him much away from home. Ellen was therefore a great deal alone: for maidenly prudence prevented her from calling in next door as often as she could have desired, or as Leonard would have wished to see her. Still she did now and then pass an hour or two with Mr. Mitchell and his son, relieving the latter in his task of reading or his post at the chess-table. The old gentleman was deeply attached to Ellen Pomfret; and the more so, inasmuch as it appeared to be a settled thing that the two families were to be closely united by means of the marriage of the young people. But no day was fixed for this event—nor indeed did the engagement appear to be more than a tacit one; for the reader must remember that at the time when we introduce the hero and heroine of this narrative, the former was only twenty years of age, and the latter nineteen.

The third house to which our present history especially refers, was inhabited by an old bachelor, who at the time alluded to was upwards of sixty. He was a fine man for his age—boasted that he had not yet taken to spectacles—and walked as upright and as rapidly as if he were twenty years younger. His rubicund countenance was the very picture of good-nature: and a very good-natured being he in reality was. But he was whimsical and eccentric to a degree; and, though very rich and proud of his elegantly furnished abode, he seldom invited a grown-up person to cross his threshold—much less to partake of his hospitality. But, on the other hand, he was devotedly attached to children; and his greatest delight was to assemble a dozen or so of his neighbours' little sons and daughters in his comfortable parlour or handsome drawing-room, and make them all as happy as he could. This was certainly a strange and most unusual predilection for an old bachelor to entertain;—but there are exceptions to all rules—and Mr. Gamble was a living proof of the dogma. He was wont to say that it

did his heart good to behold rosy-cheeked, flax-haired, laughing-eyed children romping about him,—that it awakened blessed feelings in his soul to hear their merry shouts and witness their innocence at mirth,—and that he fancied himself young again when presiding at the table around which he gathered them, and where he dispensed fruit, cake, sweet wine, and comfitures with no niggard hand. Be it understood, then, that—at least to our mind—Mr. Gamble was a most estimable character: for he who is fond of children cannot possibly be a bad man—whereas we have no confidence whatever in the individual who does not experience a lively interest in those endearing, artless little beings. Mr. Gamble did not consider it to be at all derogatory to his nature or his age, to join in the infantile sports which he loved so much to behold; and when the curtains were drawn and the door closed, he would even consent to become an active party to a game of blind-man's-buff, or allow himself to be converted for the nonce into a horse for the express behoof of some chubby urchin more bold in his requisitions than the rest.

Mr. Gamble was indeed quite a character. He used frequently to declare that he knew nothing more silly than to give dinner-parties. "Friendship is a very queer thing," he would say, "if it must be shown by my eating at another's expense, or by him coming to me to eat at mine. I would sooner spend ten pounds upon cakes and oranges for children who really enjoy them, than ten shillings on a repast for a grown-up person, who eats in your presence as if under the influence of a chilling ceremony." Relative to adults, therefore, Mr. Gamble neither gave nor accepted invitations: but twice or thrice a-week he congregated his little friends around him—and the more they romped, the better he was pleased,—the more noise they made, the higher did his spirits rise. If they injured his furniture, he cared not, provided it was the result of an accident: but if he once discovered a predilection to wilful destructiveness, or if he were made the butt of coarse rudeness instead of the object of innocent merriment, he never again invited the offender to his abode.

Considering that the habits of Mr. Gamble were such as we have taken some little trouble to describe them, it may easily be supposed that the neighbours were not a little astonished when it was rumoured, and ascertained to be a positive fact, that Mr. Pomfret had veritably and actually been invited to dine with that eccentric gentleman. This was alone enough to create an impression that a revolution had taken place in the opinions of the old bachelor: but the wonderment was excessive when it was reported, and likewise discovered to be true, that Mr. Gamble had dined in his turn with Mr. Pomfret. At first it was supposed that the cunning merchant was seeking to ensnare the wealthy bachelor into a marriage with the beautiful Ellen: but when it was remembered that she was engaged to Leonard, and moreover when it was ascertained that she had passed the evening at the Mitchell's on the occasion of the old bachelor dining with her father, the above-mentioned speculation was instantly discarded. That a revolution had taken place in the habits of Mr. Gamble, was however very certain: for as time wore on, after those first interchanges of civilities between him and Mr. Pomfret, their intimacy appeared to increase, and the parties given by the old bachelor to his young

friends grew less frequent. At length not a day passed without an interview occurring between Gamble and Pomfret: they were often closetted together for hours in the evening, when the latter returned home from the City; and the merchant was moreover frequently seen taking bundles of papers and correspondence into the other's house. It was therefore surmised that they were engaged together in some speculation: but if this were the case, it was kept very quiet—for even Ellen herself could give her lover Leonard no explanation relative to the causes of the intimacy that had sprung up so suddenly between her father and Mr. Gamble.

A conversation which we are about to record, will however throw some light upon the subject. It was about six months after the intimacy had commenced, that Mr. Pomfret returned home from the City at a later hour than usual, and with a countenance so pale and careworn, that he appeared to his affrighted daughter ten years older than when he quitted her in the morning. Ellen anxiously implored him to inform her if anything unpleasant had occurred: but he gave her a sharp reply in the negative—as much as to enjoin her to abstain from questioning him in future. The poor girl turned aside to conceal the tears that gushed from her eyes; and Mr. Pomfret, struck by the sudden conviction that he had behaved most harshly to his amiable daughter, exclaimed, "Forgive me, Ellen: but—to tell you the truth—I have received disagreeable intelligence in the City to-day; and it probably soured my temper for the moment. You are a good girl," he added, kissing the tearful countenance that was now upturned towards his own; "and I was wrong to speak unkindly to you. But let that pass: I shall have more command over myself another time."—"Pray do not dwell upon the subject, my dearest father," said Ellen. "Will you have dinner served up at once?"—"No, my love," was the answer: "I do not feel in any humour for eating. I meant to say," he added, hastily, but with some degree of confusion, "I dined in the City to-day. And now I shall just run in and see Mr. Gamble for an hour or two; and you can go and play a game of chess with Mr. Mitchell. I shall return to supper presently: so mind and be home again by half-past nine."—"You told me the day before yesterday, dear papa," said Ellen, "that the next time I called on Mr. Mitchell, I was to be sure and ask you for a cheque for the quarter's income due to him, and which has been standing over for nearly a fortnight."—"Oh! it does not matter this evening!" ejaculated Mr. Pomfret, impatiently: "besides, I have not time to sit down and fill up a cheque at present," he added, a sickly expression passing over his countenance, as if his heart were smitten painfully within his breast. Then, without making another observation and in evident haste to avoid further parlance on the subject, the merchant threw on his hat and hurried next door. A sigh escaped from Ellen's gentle bosom—for she saw that there was some profound grief in the depths of her father's soul, and, anxious to escape from the distressing thoughts which such a conviction was only too well calculated to engender, she made the greater speed to dress herself for a visit to her neighbours.

We must for the present follow Mr. Pomfret, whom we shall overtake in Mr. Gamble's back-parlour, which was fitted up as a library, and contained a small but choice collection of books. The

old bachelor was discussing some cool claret—for it was in the midst of a hot summer; and the moment the merchant made his appearance, he rang for another glass. Mr. Pomfret sank upon a seat, with the air of a man who is exhausted in mind and body; and when the servant had retired, he fixed his eyes intently on his friend's countenance, as he said in a low and solemn tone, "Gamble, I have dreadful news for you!"—"For which I am not altogether unprepared," returned the old bachelor, his countenance becoming serious—if not absolutely severe.—"How? what do you mean?" demanded Pomfret, the gloomy expression of his features giving way to one of profound astonishment.—"I mean," replied Mr. Gamble, now bending his gaze with unmistakeable sternness on his companion, "that for a week past I have had forced upon my mind the painful conviction that you were deceiving me."—"Deceiving you!" cried Mr. Pomfret, his cheek blanching, and his tall spare form trembling either with rage or guilt, it was not easy immediately to decide which.—"Yes: deceiving me, and most grossly deceiving me too!" exclaimed Mr. Gamble, striking the table violently with his clenched fist.—Mr. Pomfret fell back in his chair, aghast and speechless, like a man from whose countenance the vizard of duplicity has been suddenly torn.—"You doubtless desire an explanation," resumed Mr. Gamble; "and you shall have it. Six months have elapsed, sir," he continued, his tone becoming reproachful rather than angry, "since I called at your counting-house in the City to receive the amount of a draught which had been forwarded to me from abroad by a gentleman to whom I advanced a certain sum many years ago, and which I had given up as lost. The sudden and most unexpected recovery of that amount somewhat renewed my confidence in human nature—a confidence not altogether destroyed, but long dormant in my breast. You remember that we began to converse upon commercial topics; and you finally stated that if I did not immediately require the sum I had called to receive, you knew how to lay it out for me in a safe quarter and at good interest. I accepted the proposal;—firstly, because the funds were so high at the moment that I did not choose to buy the money in—secondly, because we were neighbours, and had known each other, to speak to at least, for some years—and thirdly, because I was in a good humour with mankind at the moment. You were pleased, on your side; and when you wrote to me a few days afterwards to state that the money was invested according to the terms settled between us, I resolved to carry my good feeling still farther—and I asked you to dinner. Subsequently you returned the compliment; and I began to think that my long-sustained misanthropy was founded in error. This belief opened my heart still farther towards you: and when I came to know your amiable daughter, I felt convinced that all men and women were not deceivers. Such was the state of my mind—progressing from a morbid to a healthy condition—when you proposed certain speculations to me. I accepted them to a limited extent, and on particular terms. I advanced the money you required to carry out your designs; but I adopted the precaution to avoid anything like a partnership. And this I did only as a wise precaution—for I had tutored myself to place the utmost confidence in you. As time wore on, you constantly demanded fresh supplies—and I

did not refuse them, so specious were your representations. But by degrees I began to entertain vague suspicions that everything was not as you would have me view it; and I latterly instituted inquiries. A week only has elapsed since I acquired the certainty that the larger portion of the money advanced by me to you was never laid out in the way and for the purposes represented by yourself; but that it has been employed to stop up gaps and supply deficiencies in your deeply-embarrassed establishment!"—"My God! this is but too true!" murmured the miserable Pomfret. "But you will be merciful towards a man who is reduced to despair?"—"I shall not harm you, sir: neither shall I expose you," returned Mr. Gamble, while the merchant's countenance somewhat brightened up at this assurance. "Perhaps, indeed," added the old bachelor, after a slight pause, "I may even save you yet."—"Save me!" echoed Pomfret. "Oh! no: that is impossible! I am so deeply involved that I owe three times as much as all you are likely to possess."—"I am not so sure of that, sir," returned Mr. Gamble, almost in a good-humoured tone: then, immediately resuming his former seriousness of voice, he said, "It is not so much the loss of my fourteen thousand pounds that I deplore: but it is that you have changed my habits, and I am not so happy as I was. The dealings that I had with men in my earlier years, made me mistrust them and taught me to look upon them with unvarying suspicion. Therefore was it that when I became rich enough to retire into private life, and more than rich enough for my purposes, I abjured the society of those whom the world had spoilt, and sought the society of those who were too young to be tainted by that world. I withdrew myself from the hot atmosphere breathed by men and women, and joyed in the freshness of the pure air in which frank, merry, artless, and sportive children dwelt. My heart, while closing towards one section of the human race, expanded towards another; and I have loved the infantine race as dearly—oh! as dearly as if I had been the father of a vast family. But when I renewed my intercourse with adults—that is to say, when I was tempted to join your society and that of the two or three gentlemen and ladies whom I have occasionally met at your house—I felt my love for that infantine race diminishing: or rather, their presence afforded me less delight and amusement. It is all this that I deplore; and the result has been that my home now seems lonely, and the time hangs heavily upon my hands. Nay, more: you have been the means of effecting that change in me which has made me selfish: and I feel capable even of sacrificing the happiness of another so long as I can in any way minister unto my own."—"I do not understand you," said Pomfret, fearful that these last words implied some vindictive allusion to himself.—"I will explain my meaning," replied Mr. Gamble. "You tell me that you are so deeply involved that ruin stares you in the face?"—"I am so utterly denuded of resources at this moment," answered Pomfret, "that I cannot even pay the quarter's income due to my neighbour and late partner, Mr. Mitchell."—"And if you fail, that poor paralytic old man will be reduced to beggary?" said Gamble. —Pomfret covered his face with his hands, and groaned aloud.

"Nay, more than all this," continued the old bachelor, after a long pause, during which he appeared to be sipping his claret complacently, but

was in reality reflecting profoundly,—"more than all this, your partners will be utterly ruined; and they will curse you as the fatal cause of their dishonour and their penury. Your daughter, too, will become a portionless girl; and she will moan the follies of her father that reduced her from a state of comparative affluence to a condition of toil for a poor pittance. Lastly, that fine young man, Leonard Mitchell, will hate and abhor you as the individual who has made his father's last years wretched and intolerable, and deprived the afflicted septuagenarian of the very necessities of life. All these terrible things, Mr. Pomfret, will be accomplished on the day when your house stops payment."—"I know it, alas! too well!" exclaimed the unhappy, ruined merchant, clasping his hands together in deep agony.—"You are not so old by ten or a dozen years as I am," continued Mr. Gamble: "and yet it does me harm to see you thus reduced to despair. But let us not waste precious time. What is the amount that will save you from ruin?"—"I dare not name it," returned Pomfret.—"This is foolish," exclaimed the old bachelor, severely: "come, answer me, or else let our interview terminate at once. Again I demand of you the amount that can prevent all the lamentable occurrences which I just now detailed?"—"Eighty thousand pounds," was the reply, delivered almost in a fit of desperation.

Mr. Gamble rose, opened his desk, and taking out some Bank securities, directed the merchant's attention to the sums specified in those documents. "Ninety-five thousand pounds!" cried Pomfret, astonished at these evidences of a wealth far greater than he had supposed the old bachelor to be possessed of.—"You perceive," observed Mr. Gamble, returning the papers to his desk, and resuming his seat,—"you perceive that I am the master of means sufficient to save you from destruction. Indeed, I can spare the sum necessary, and even then have four hundred pounds a-year left to live upon."—"But is it possible that you can even entertain the idea of assisting me to such an extent?" cried Mr. Pomfret, scarcely able to believe his own ears, and trembling lest he was indulging in a hope that had no other existence than in a dream.—"It is quite possible, sir," responded the old bachelor, piqued that his word should be questioned even for a moment: "and now it all depends upon yourself."—"Upon myself!" repeated Mr. Pomfret, again surveying his friend with mingled amazement and incredulity.—"Yes: upon yourself," cried Mr. Gamble: "for the amount you require is at your service, provided you consent to accept me as your son-in-law!"—These words were delivered with a solemn seriousness of tone which forbade the suspicion that they were uttered jocularly; and so completely astounded was the merchant that several minutes elapsed before he could make any reply. During that interval Mr. Gamble still appeared to sip his claret with calmness: but he was in reality awaiting with no small degree of anxiety the answer that would be given to his proposal.

"But do you love my daughter?" inquired Pomfret at length.—"I have already told you that I begin to feel lonely and cheerless," replied Mr. Gamble; "and, moreover, I am irresistibly attracted towards Miss Ellen. I may also say that I should feel proud and happy to ensure her an independence: at the same time, I am not endowed with sufficient philanthropy to induce me to save her father from ruin, except on the condition of receiving her as a

wife. If my suit be refused, you are ruined; and will it in that case be prudent to permit her to espouse that young Mitchell, who will likewise be reduced to penury? It is clear that if she do not accept my offer, circumstances will effectually interpose a barrier between herself and Leonard; and thus, happen what will, she must renounce all hope of becoming his bride."—"And with the conviction that she *does* love Leonard Mitchell, would you accompany her to the altar?" inquired Mr. Pomfret.—"Assuredly," replied Mr. Gamble. "I have set my mind upon it, and will risk everything. She is young, and a first love is seldom more than a blaze of straw, ardent while it lasts, but speedily exhausted. When she comes to know me well, and to reflect that I have saved her father from ruin and dishonour,—when, too, she perceives all the delicate attentions with which I shall surround her, and the constancy of my endeavour to ensure her happiness,—she will yield to the new influences to which she will be thus subjected; and she will learn to look upon the old man with respect and veneration, with gratitude and kindly feelings, if not with love. The trial may be for the first few weeks severe; and there may be deep regrets following upon the disappointment of the vivid hopes now cherished in her bosom. But, believe me, she will at length succumb to the conviction that her happiness has been better consulted by the course chalked out for her by us, than by that into which the present state of her affections might impel her."—Pomfret was man of the world enough to know that all this was mere sophistry; though Gamble himself believed that he was arguing on the truest principles: but the merchant was better acquainted than the old bachelor with the female heart. Nevertheless, the temptation was irresistible to the man who hovered upon the verge of ruin: the feelings of the father were sacrificed to the anxieties of the merchant, who saw destruction staring him in the face;—and, grasping Gamble's hand, he said in a deep, impressive tone, "She is yours!"

In the meantime Ellen Pomfret, little suspecting how her destinies were being disposed of elsewhere, was passing a couple of hours with Mr. Mitchell and Leonard. The young man had noticed, the moment she entered their parlour, that her countenance was pale; and, with the eagle glance of a lover, he likewise discovered that she had been weeping. Burning with impatience to ascertain the cause of her grief, and not choosing to elicit an explanation in the presence of his father, for fear anything might transpire to give the old gentleman pain, as he was much attached to the young maiden, whom he looked upon as his intended daughter-in-law,—Leonard exclaimed, as soon as she had paid her respects to his parent, "You are just in time, Ellen, to help me to tie up a few new plants which I have purchased:"—and, taking her hand, he led her into the little garden at the back of the house. A very little garden it was, too: but Leonard had made the most of the circumscribed space; and he had in reality bought some choice flowers in the morning. It was not however to them that he now directed the lovely girl's attention; but the moment they stood in the enclosure, he took her hand, saying, "Ellen, dearest, you are unhappy this evening: pray tell me what has annoyed you?"—Miss Pomfret, who was ingenuousness itself, instantly related the scene that had taken place between herself and her father; and the tears again started from her

eyes, as she remembered the harsh—almost brutal manner in which he had spoken to her. Leonard hastened to kiss those diamond drops away from the damask cheeks adown which they trickled; and he consoled her by observing that persons in business were liable to those annoyances that occasionally soured the temper and rendered them severe or hasty even to the very beings whom they loved the most. Leonard's powers of persuasion were omnipotent with Ellen; and she speedily smiled through her tears. "And now," continued the young man, "I will give you a piece of intelligence that will, I hope, indemnify you, dearest, for the little vexation you have just experienced. My father has this day received a letter from an influential friend, stating that I may rely upon being nominated to a clerkship in a Government Office in the course of a month or six weeks."—Ellen expressed her delight at these news; and after the interchange of a few tender sentiments, the nature of which our readers can well divine, the youthful lovers returned to the parlour. There they sat and conversed with the old gentleman until the time-piece on the mantel indicated that it was twenty-five minutes past nine, when Ellen rose and took her departure, Leonard escorting her to the door of the adjoining house, where she dwelt.

Her father had returned about ten minutes previously. The curtains were drawn in the parlour—the lamp was lighted—and the supper was in readiness. The moment she entered the room, the beautiful girl cast an anxious look towards her sire, to gather from his countenance, if possible, whether his mind had become more composed: but she was shocked to perceive that his cheeks were ashy pale, and that a strange, ominous light gleamed in his restless, anxious eyes. She withdrew her gaze instantly, fearful lest he might observe that she noticed his peculiarity of manner and altered appearance; and, making some casual remark, she turned to lay aside her bonnet and also to conceal the tears that again started into her eyes. For Ellen was of an affectionate disposition, and loved her father tenderly, and it touched her heart to the very core to behold the traces of deep, deep care upon his countenance.

"You have seen Leonard this evening, Ellen?" said Mr. Pomfret, in a tone so hollow that it startled her: and she could scarcely compose herself sufficiently to murmur an affirmative.—"And do you love him very, very much?" asked the merchant, after a long pause.—"Oh! my dearest father," she exclaimed, "you know that I do! Have we not as it were been brought up together from childhood?"—"Yes, yes: it is natural," said Mr. Pomfret, bitterly: and he walked to the mantel-piece, turning his back towards his daughter, to hide the emotions that swelled his heart almost to bursting. But Ellen caught sight of his agonising countenance in the mirror; and, terribly excited, she sprang towards him and threw her arms around his neck, crying, "Oh! my dearest parent, some dreadful grief oppresses you! May I not share it? Can I not console you? Is there anything that I, poor weak girl that I am, can do to ease you of this load of sorrow?"—"Yes, Ellen," hastily responded her father, determined to come at once to an explanation with his daughter; for suspense and delay were intolerable. "You can do all, everything for me: my honour is in your hands! 'Tis for you also to decide whether we shall be re-

duced to penury, or remain in affluence—whether that poor palsied old man next door shall continue to enjoy the comforts of life, or be plunged into destitution! In a word, Ellen, my very existence is in your hands; for I will not live to witness all the terrible afflictions that my accursed folly will have entailed upon ourselves, as well as upon others!”—Ellen was so taken by surprise as these alarming revelations burst upon her, that she started back in dismay, and surveyed her sire with a look of such passionate grief, that he himself grew affrighted in his turn; and hastily approaching her, he led her to a seat, saying, “For God’s sake, compose yourself, Ellen: you have need of all your firmness now!”—With a frantic gesture she besought him to keep her no longer in suspense, but to tell her the worst at once.—“I will not torture you, my love,” said the wretched man, standing like a culprit in her presence. “Know, then, that I hover on the brink of ruin. It is not that I think bankruptcy dishonourable: no—the most upright men are liable to misfortune, and cannot control adversity. But, were I to fail, as I am now circumstanced, I could not save my name from indelible disgrace, nor my partners and the Mitchells likewise from ruin!”—Speechless with horror and amazement, the young girl gazed fixedly on her father as he spoke.—“But there are still means of saving me and the others also,” he resumed, in a tone so broken that it indicated how difficult and how painful it was for him to give utterance to this prelude to an announcement which he knew must prove terrible indeed.—“And those means?” demanded Ellen, recovering the use of her own voice: for she saw that there was allusion to herself in her father’s words.—“Nerve yourself, my poor girl, to hear something very shocking to your gentle heart,” said Mr. Pomfret.—“I am nerved *now*,” she replied, her features assuming the settled aspect of despair. “But the means?” she repeated, more impatiently.—“That you renounce Leonard Mitchell, and accept Mr. Gamble as your husband,” said the wretched father, speaking with averted head. A shriek escaped Ellen’s lips—and she started wildly from her seat: then, staggering forward a few paces, she fell into her parent’s arms—not insensible, but sobbing convulsively. She had been prepared for some dreadful tidings: she was not, however, nerved to meet such a frightful destiny as that so suddenly offered to her contemplation;—and she felt as if she must sink under the blow. Mr. Pomfret bore her to the sofa; and, placing himself by her side, said all he could to console her:—no—not all he *could*—but all he *dared*;—for he had not courage enough to recall the words that had sealed her fate!

We must, however, draw a veil over this afflicting scene. Suffice it to say that the noble-minded girl eventually came to the determination to sacrifice herself for the sake of her father—yes, and for the sake of the palsied parent of her lover also! There is a crisis in misery that is in reality despair, although it may have the outward appearance of resignation: and this was the condition of the young lady, when she said to her father, “I will not prove a disobedient daughter. I therefore consent to renounce Leonard Mitchell, and to become the wife of him who demands my hand as the price of the succour which he is willing to afford you in this embarrassment.” Mr. Pomfret embraced her with the most unfeigned ardour, and thanked her in the most touching terms for her devotedness;

and, strange as it may perhaps appear, Ellen besought him that the sacrifice should be accomplished as speedily as possible. This is, however, invariably the case with a noble heart that resolves upon the immolation of its best affections: the maiden feared lest selfish considerations should arise from delay, to turn her from her purpose;—and she was anxious that her self-martyrdom should be performed heroically and with a good grace. But, oh! in one short hour how changed was her pure soul: how bitter—how intense was now the disappointment that succeeded the golden dream she had cherished;—how stern, and bleak, and cheerless seemed that world on which she had lately looked as on a fair and sunny landscape, fragrant with flowers and beautiful with verdure. Yes—gloomy indeed is the earth, and worthless is existence, when viewed through the same mirror which reflects the heart’s ruined hopes and blighted affections!

But who was to break the news to Leonard Mitchell? Ellen was not equal to that task: indeed, she dared not see him. She felt that if she were to gaze again upon his handsome countenance—if she were to read despair in his eloquent eyes and listen to the passionate accents of his melodious though manly voice, appealing to her against the stern resolve to which circumstances had impelled her,—she felt, we say, that she should yield, and that by so yielding she should fix her parent’s doom. Mr. Pomfret therefore took upon himself the mournful task of imparting to the young man the disappointment that awaited him; and this was done the morning after the incidents which we have just described. The merchant threw himself upon Leonard’s mercy, invoking him by all he deemed sacred not to seek to see his daughter nor dissuade her by letter from her holy purpose of self-devotion. At first the impetuosity of youth rendered the lover deaf to all reason and to all entreaties: but by degrees he appeared to receive a kind of chivalrous inspiration from the heroic example of her whom he adored;—and he awoke to the necessity of consenting to that dreadful sacrifice, if only that his sire should not want bread in his helpless old age. He however begged that Mr. Mitchell might be kept in the dark relative to all these occurrences, until Ellen should have become the wife of Mr. Gamble—when it would be too late to recall the sacrifice, and useless to repine against it. Moreover, Leonard resolved to break the news so gradually to his father, that the effect of the blow occasioned by a son’s deep disappointment might be as much mitigated as possible; and to these proposals Mr. Pomfret was only too willing to assent. And now, as another proof of Leonard’s devotedness to his afflicted sire, must be mentioned the fact that, though bearing in his bosom a heart wrung almost to breaking, he still maintained a calm exterior; and during the week which elapsed ere Ellen became the wife of Mr. Gamble, Mr. Mitchell beheld nothing strange nor suspicious in his son’s manner.

And at the expiration of that week, the sacrifice was consummated. The marriage was solemnised by special license, and with great privacy; and it was not known in Stamford-street until a late hour on the wedding-day that such an extraordinary alliance had taken place. By that time the victim-bride was far away from London—seated by the side of her old husband in the post-chaise that was bearing them to some country-place where they

were to pass the honeymoon. Mr. Pomfret had received the price stipulated for his daughter; and his honour—his commercial honour, we mean—was saved! Alas! how many marriages of this unnatural kind are constantly taking place in this civilised—this enlightened—this Bible-reading—this moral country!—how many fair young maidens are purchased by old men's gold, the performance of the religious ceremony only adding a hideous mockery to a flagrant injustice! And yet how shocked are these mercenary fathers and match-making mothers who thus sacrifice their daughters' pure affections to the most selfish interests—how shocked, we say, are they when they read that there are countries in the world where men buy their wives outright! Oh! ye Exeter Hall Saints, who send forth missionaries to christianise the heathen amongst whom such barter or purchase prevails, have ye nothing to reform at home? Is the Mussulman who buys his Circassian or his Georgian wife in a slave-market more reprehensible than the tottering old lord or the nabob with his liver eaten away, who purchases an English, a Scotch, or an Irish beauty in the market of West End Fashion? Go, ye Exeter Hall Saints, into that sphere where all is glitter outside and hollowness of heart within, and count the many titled or wealthy septuagenaries to whose corpse-like side fresh and blooming girls of nineteen and twenty are bound by marriage-ties! Are such alliances founded upon those holy affections which God has implanted in the human breast?—or are they proofs of the rebellion which selfish interests consummate against nature's laws and heaven's own divine promptings? But if we direct our attention to that sphere where in the industrious millions struggle with starvation, oppression, and wrong, do we find such instances of outrage against all that is natural, moral, and just? Do we discover the agricultural labourer or the mechanic of seventy with a wife of nineteen? Out of a hundred marriages in humble life, there is not more than one such case. And yet the aristocratic, the wealthy, and the great are ever declaiming upon the immorality of the poor! Immorality indeed! 'Tis you, ye aristocrats, who are in reality demoralised: 'tis you, ye oppressors, who would stand a far better chance of winning a place in heaven, were ye to imitate the humble virtues of the oppressed! Oh! the soul sickens at the idea that a lazy, indolent, intolerant oligarchy should be permitted to heap so much abuse upon the tolling, starving, deeply-wronged millions!

But to return to the thread of our narrative. It was in the evening of the day on which Ellen became the wife of Mr. Gamble, that Mr. Mitchell was seated at the open window of his front parlour, a wire-blind enabling him to note all that passed in the street, but preventing persons outside from peering into the room. Leonard was sitting near him, and racking his brain for the best means to commence a conversation to which he might give such a turn as to enable him to break the news of the day to his father. But every time the young man prepared to speak, his heart's emotions rose as if to suffocate him, and at last he was obliged to hurry from the parlour and seek his own chamber in order to give free vent to feelings that could no longer be restrained. Scarcely had he left the room, when two gentlemen—dwellers in Stamford Street—encountered each other precisely opposite the Mitchells' window; and after the usual greet-

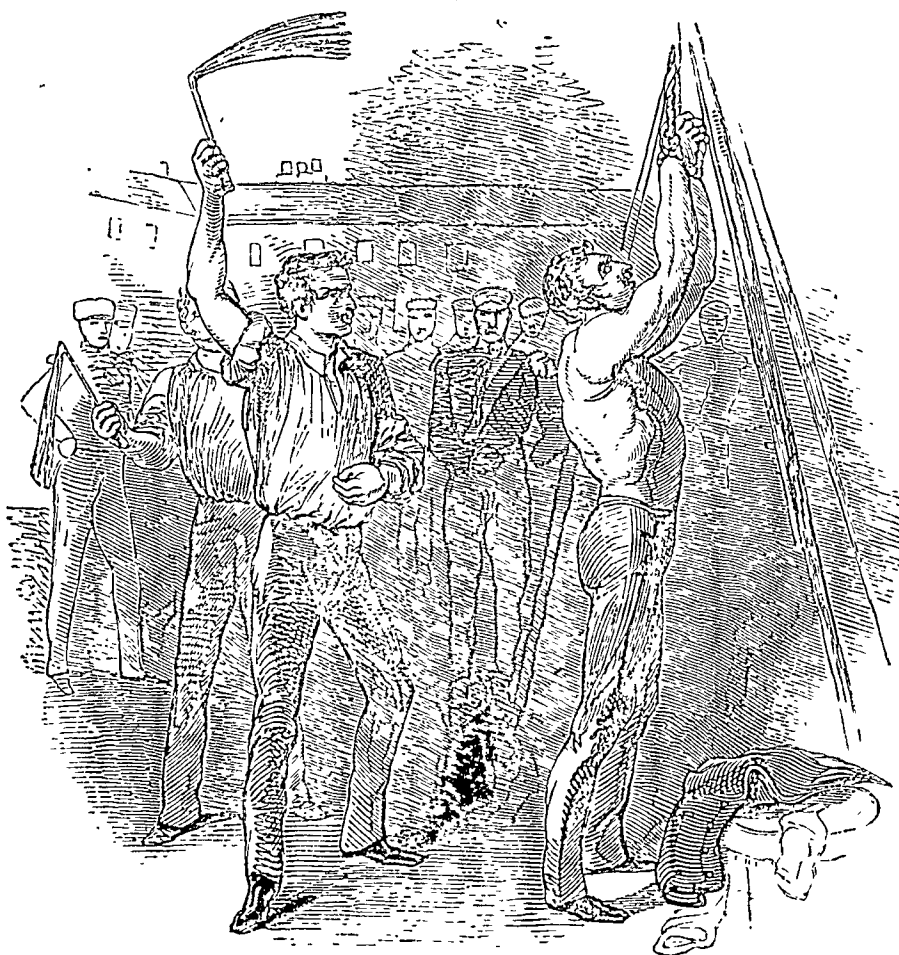
ings, one said: "I am just going to call upon our mutual friend Mr. Pomfret, to congratulate him."—"Congratulate him!" exclaimed the other: "upon what event?"—"On the marriage of his daughter with the wealthy Mr. Gamble," was the reply. "What! you have not heard of it? Oh! it is quite true, I can assure you. The ceremony took place this morning: I have the fact from the clergyman's own lips."—"But I thought that Miss Pomfret was engaged to Leonard Mitchell?" observed the other gentleman, evidently much amazed by the intelligence he had just received.—"Hush!" said the first speaker, glancing significantly towards the open window; and, taking his friend's arm, he drew him a few paces further on. But had they stayed to enter into further explanations, it would have been all the same: the conviction that his unhappy son had sustained a most frightful blow to his happiness, burst upon the mind of the wretched father like a tornado on a traveller in the desert; and when Leonard returned to the room, he found the old man a corpse in his chair!

CHAPTER CLXXVIII.

CONCLUSION OF THE HISTORY OF THE HAUNTED HOUSES.

THREE years had elapsed since the occurrences just related; and it was on a fine summer afternoon that a tall, handsome young soldier, in the graceful undress of a private in a dragoon regiment, was walking down Regent Street. His countenance was somewhat sunburnt; but there was about him such an air of gentility that, even had he been far less good-looking than he really was, it would have been impossible to pass him by with indifference. His figure was slight, but admirably formed and well knit: his legs were straight as a dart; and he carried his arms with that gentle rounding which is so compatible with military grace. His whiskers were small, but curling and glossy; and the slight moustache that he wore was quite sufficient to turn the head of any giddy girl—the more so that, as his lips were always kept the least thing apart, that fringe set off his fine teeth to greater advantage. His rich brown hair, worn short according to the regulation, stood out in small but natural curls from beneath his undress cap; and the somewhat darkly pencilled brows arched above eyes of deep blue, and in which there was a melancholy expression that did not however deteriorate from the masculine beauty of his person. His uniform was scrupulously neat: his boots well polished; his buckskin gloves white as snow;—and did he remove those gloves, his hands appeared to be almost as delicate in complexion as a lady's. In a word he was the very *beau idéal* of a soldier; and nature's stamp of aristocracy was upon him:—yet was he only a private—a humble private in his regiment!

We said that the day was remarkably fine; and it was at that hour when the fashionable world goes forth to while away the time until dinner. Regent Street was thronged with gay equipages filled with elegantly dressed ladies, and attended by domestics in gaudy liveries; and the footways were likewise crowded, but with a more miscellaneous company. For when the daughters of fashion appear abroad in the afternoon, the daugh-



ters of crime likewise come forth; and yet we doubt whether the immorality that walks the pavement is so much greater than that which rides in carriages as the world generally supposes. Behold that magnificent equipage wherein the elderly dowager and the beauteous young girl of seventeen or eighteen are seated: it stops at the door of a fashionable linen-draper's, and the dowager leans heavily on the arm of the tall, handsome footman who hands her out, while the young lady throws a rapid but significant glance at the slim, graceful page who has likewise dismounted from behind the vehicle. Or again, behold that gentleman on horseback, moving leisurely along, and gazing intently at each carriage which approaches down the wide avenue: at length he recognises the equipage which he is so anxiously expecting—and, riding up, he exchanges a few words with the fair creature who is its sole occupant. A day, an hour, and a place are named for an appointment of even a far less innocent nature than this one; and the lover passes on with triumph in his heart, while the carriage whirls away the titled lady who has already assented to a step that must lead to the dishonour of her husband. Again, be-

hold the splendid chariot, with a coronet on the panel, and in which three beauteous girls with their maternal parent—herself a fine woman—are seated. Would you believe that care was harboured in hearts where smiles appear on radiant countenances? And yet, the eldest of those sisters is a prey to a mortal apprehension: she has been frail—weak—the victim of her own strong desires and the opportunity afforded by some handsome, but obscure and ineligible lover; and now she dreads lest a few months should betray her unchastity and ruin her for ever. But we have not leisure to extend this picture:—we must return to the handsome dragoon who is walking, in a leisurely but somewhat thoughtful manner, down Regent Street.

And wherefore was he thus partially pensive? Because nearly three years had elapsed since he had last seen London, and his return to the capital revived a thousand reflections which were indeed sufficient to touch his heart painfully. He thought of his early youth—the hopes which he had cherished when the future was bright before him—the crushing disappointments and accumulated miseries that had suddenly fallen upon his head—and his present

position, so different from what it ought to be. Yes—and he thought, too, of one whom he had loved so fondly—oh! so fondly, that his passion was a worship—an idolatry, and whose image was indelibly impressed upon his soul. Time had taught him the necessity of resignation to a lot which he could not alter—a fate which he could not change—a destiny which he could not subdue: and though that same resignation, aided by the faith of a sincere Christian and a firm reliance on Him who disposeth of all things, had deprived his anguish of its sting and blunted the iron that had entered into his soul—there were, nevertheless, moments when the cloud came over the handsome countenance, and the soldier's heart swelled almost to bursting. And this was now the state of his mind as he passed along the fashionable quarter of that metropolis where he had arrived with his regiment only the evening before. He had no particular aim in view—he was not on his way to see any friends: the only being on the face of the earth in whom he felt interested, was she whom he had once loved so devotedly—whom he still loved with the mellowed and almost embittered affection of disappointment—and whom he dared not inquire after, much less venture to visit. His return to the capital had unsettled him: he felt no inclination to remain in the barracks and pursue his favourite recreation of reading—and he had therefore walked abroad in the hope of diverting his mind from the unpleasant thoughts that intruded upon it.

The handsome dragoon had just entered the arcade of the Quadrant, when he was suddenly struck as if by paralysis—or as it were with a violent blow dealt by an invisible hand: he stopped short—then staggered back a few paces—and leant against one of the pillars for support,—his countenance the while denoting the most intense emotions. For, issuing from a shop, were two persons both of whom he instantaneously recognised, but on one of whom his eyes became rivetted as if by enchantment. Yes:—there was Ellen—the Ellen whom he had loved—whom he still loved—leaning on the arm of her old husband—that man who had robbed him—Leonard Mitchell—of the object of such a fervent and undying affection! But neither the lady herself nor Mr. Gamble observed the young soldier: for, on issuing from the shop, they passed down the Quadrant; and thus their backs were almost immediately turned upon him. Recovering his presence of mind, and passing his hand hastily across his brow, as if to tear away a mist that hung upon his eyes, Leonard Mitchell—for he indeed was the handsome young dragoon—was already pushing his way amidst the crowd and hurrying after Ellen, when the thought flashed, like blasting lightning, to his soul, that she was an elegantly dressed lady, leaning on the arm of a husband who was evidently a gentleman of substance—and he was a common soldier! Oh! never—never were the accursed class-distinctions of an artificial state of society felt so bitterly as on the present occasion. Not that Leonard mistrusted Ellen's heart—not that he feared of experiencing a cold reception from one of her generous nature: but a sense of propriety—a deep conviction of what was due, under circumstances, to herself and her husband, caused him suddenly to stop short; then, in obedience to the new impulse which was received from this revulsion of his feelings, he turned abruptly from the Quadrant into one of those

streets that stretch towards the district of Golden Square.

Walking on, like one intoxicated, and with eyes that saw nothing—as if all the powers of vision, physical and mental, were absorbed in the necessity of internal contemplation—the young man felt as if he were going mad. There was a fearful hurry in his brain; and yet, palpable and distinct, as it were, in his heart was the image that for years had been there, but each feature—each lineament of which had suddenly received the most vivid colourings of revival. She was beautiful as ever—more beautiful, if possible, in the glory of her womanhood; and, although her countenance was somewhat pale and had a melancholy—yes, a very melancholy expression—this only added to her charms, in his estimation, by rendering her the more interesting. By degrees, his thoughts grew more settled—the whirlwind that raged in his brain, abated in violence; and suddenly there sprang up in his soul a feeling of pleasure at the idea that her features wore that shade of mournfulness. For, oh! there could be no doubt as to the cause: she was unhappy—unhappy on account of him! She had not, then, forgotten him—she remembered their youthful loves: perhaps he was still dear to her? That thought became more delightful, as it seemed more consistent with probability; and now he was not altogether so thoroughly devoid of hope—so profoundly a prey to black despair, as he had been a few minutes previously. Hope, indeed! what could he hope? He knew not—he did not immediately pause to ask himself the question: but he abandoned himself to the delicious reverie into which the altered current of his thoughts thus madly hurried him. When he awoke, as it were, from this day-dream, he was astonished to find that it had lasted so long, and without interruption: for, while wrapped up in that vision, he had threaded many streets—accomplished a considerable distance—and was now close to the toll-gate of Waterloo Bridge. Entering upon that mighty viaduct, he seated himself in one of the recesses, and again gave way to the meditations which the incident of the afternoon had conjured up.

But how was it that Leonard Mitchell had taken the direction of Waterloo Bridge, in that species of somnambulism under which he had been labouring? Because it was the way to Stamford Street; and, in his walking reverie, an irresistible impulse had influenced his footsteps, even while he appeared to be proceeding at random. And what now was the nature of his reflections? He experienced an ardent longing to cross the bridge—to enter Stamford Street—and to behold once more the house where all his early years were passed: yes—and to behold also the dwelling of her whom he loved! But did he know that Mr. and Mrs. Gamble still resided in Stamford Street? He was completely ignorant on the subject; and an ardent curiosity impelled him to clear up the point in question. Still he hesitated: amidst all the feelings by which he was now animated, and the longings by which he was prompted, a sense of duty rose up in his mind,—of duty towards her whom he loved,—towards her husband—and towards himself. Why should he incur the risk of meeting her, and perhaps unsettling her studied attempts at unmixed devotion to him whose name she bore?—why should he do aught that might arouse the suspicion or excite the jealousy of the old man who doubtless treasured his

young wife as a peerless jewel?—and why should he resuscitate all his own griefs and sorrows, by an encounter with one who was lost to him perhaps for ever? These questions did he ask himself over and over again: they were the basis of the reasoning which he held with his own heart—his own soul—in order to crush the promptings that urged him towards the scene of past and happier days. Alas! with all his natural rectitude of principle—with all his generosity of disposition—with all his honourable feelings, Leonard Mitchell was but a poor weak mortal, like the rest of us;—and while still arguing with himself, he was traversing the bridge—he was directing his way towards Stamford Street!

As he drew nearer to the end of the long thoroughfare—that end which joins the Blackfriars Road—he relaxed his speed; and though his pace was slower, his heart beat more rapidly. At length he came within sight of the three corner houses: he paused—he stopped—heaven alone knows how acute were the emotions that agitated within him then! Again he moved onward—he called all his courage, all his presence of mind to his aid;—and now he passed by Mr. Gamble's house. Irresistibly he glanced towards the window: his eyes met those of Ellen;—and he heard the faint scream of astonishment that burst from her lips! But the beautiful countenance had disappeared: had she, then, fainted? No—her feelings had doubtless overcome her for a few moments;—but she speedily recovered—she reappeared at the window—and a rapid sign conveyed to him the intimation that she would come forth and join him presently. All this passed so quickly as to be unobserved by any of the neighbours; although it is probable that had ten thousand pairs of eyes been rivetted on the house, Ellen would have not acted differently—for she saw no one save him of whom she had heard nothing for three long years. Leonard, half intoxicated with joy at the signal that had been made by her fair hand, and aided in its interpretation by the expression of her countenance,—scarcely believing, however, that such happiness could indeed await him—and not pausing for a single instant to ask himself whether he were acting well or even prudently—Leonard, we say, passed on. The central of the three houses was still occupied by Mr. Pomfret; for his name was on the brass-plate on the front-door:—but the corner house—the house where Leonard had dwelt so many years, and where his revered father had died in so sudden and awful a manner—was shut up, a board intimating that it was to let. The young soldier had not, however, many minutes' leisure to reflect upon the scenes of past days; for, aware that Ellen could not prudently join him within a few yards of her own door, he crossed the Blackfriars Road, and loitered at the corner of Holland Street. In a short time he beheld her approaching: she saw him—she followed the direction which he took;—and he proceeded farther down the comparatively secluded place which he had deemed most fitting for this interview. At length he halted; and in another minute his heart's idol was by his side. She had purposely put on a cottage-bonnet and a plain shawl;—and thus the few people who passed saw nothing very remarkable in a modestly dressed female in company with a private dragoon.

But even if they had attracted disagreeable notice, what was it to them who had now no thought—no eyes—no ears save for each other? Without a word

at first—but after a brief though earnest pressure of the hand—Leonard gave the young lady his arm; and they passed along Holland Street. A few low, but anxious inquiries were rapidly interchanged, and as speedily answered;—but frequent, long, and tender were the looks they fixed upon each other. A few minutes' walk brought them to Southwark Bridge, to which they ascended; and when seated in one of the recesses of that almost entirely deserted viaduct, the restraint under which they had hitherto laboured was immediately thrown aside.

"At length we meet again, Ellen," said Leonard, taking her hand and retaining it in his own, while he gazed fondly upon her.—"Yes," she replied, murmuringly, and holding down her blushing countenance: "but do you think the worse of me, because, yielding to a sudden and irresistible impulse, and availing myself of my husband's temporary absence, I thus stole forth to meet you—to hear from your own lips that you are happy?"—"Happy!" repeated Leonard, bitterly: then, unwilling to cause her additional pain, for his ejaculation had already brought the diamond-tears to her violet eyes, he said, "How can I think the worse of you, Ellen, when you come forth as a sister to pass a few minutes with a brother who can not, dares not visit you at your own abode? But rather let me ask, whether *you*, Ellen, are happy?"—The young lady endeavoured to give utterance to a reply: but, overpowered by her emotions, she burst into an agony of weeping. Unable to restrain his own feelings any longer, Leonard caught her in his arms, strained her to his breast, and imprinted a thousand kisses upon her moist lips and her tear-bedewed cheeks: for no eye, save that of God, beheld them at this moment. Several minutes passed ere either could recover the faculty of speech; and then they spoke so low—so feelingly—and in such accents of deep, deep sorrow, that it was easy for each to perceive that the love of the other had not become impaired by time, separation, or circumstances.—"You were wrong, oh! you were very wrong, Leonard," said Ellen, "to abandon your home and your friends, the moment after your father's funeral. It is true that you did not leave us altogether in uncertainty and suspense relative to your fate—that you left for me a note acquainting me with your determination to enlist and earn your bread honourably! But, oh! wherefore have adopted that distressing alternative?"—"Can you not understand my feelings, Ellen?" asked the young man, almost reproachfully. "My father's death left me without interest to obtain the situation that had been promised to me through him; and his income likewise perished with him. I had no claim upon Mr. Pomfret: neither would I have accepted eleemosynary assistance. What could I do? I disposed of the furniture to pay off the few debts owing by my father and the expenses of the funeral; and I made all my arrangements with as much haste as possible, in order to be able to leave that once happy neighbourhood before you and—and—your husband should return to it. I then repaired to Hounslow, and enlisted. Yesterday my regiment was ordered to London; and within a few hours of my arrival, I experience the happiness—the indescribable happiness of thus encountering you. And now, Ellen, let us think—or, at all events, let us talk no more of the past. I cannot bear to look back upon it. But, my God!" he exclaimed passionately, and suddenly interrupting himself: "wherefore should I dread to retro-

spect, since the happiness of the present is only transitory, and there is no hope for the future?"—Thus speaking, the young man covered his face with his hands and moaned audibly.

"Oh! this is dreadful!" exclaimed Ellen, with accents of despair. "Leonard! I implore you not to give way to affliction thus. Listen to me, my beloved one—for you are as dearly and as fondly loved as ever; and I hesitate not to give you that assurance."—"Oh! is it possible? can I believe my ears?" cried the young dragoon, now turning upon the lady a countenance suddenly lighting up with the animation of indescribable joy and bliss, as the rays of the setting sun played upon those handsome features. "But you forget," he said, after a brief pause, and with a cloud again appearing upon his face, "that you are the wife of another?"—"Then it is you who love me not!" exclaimed Ellen, in a tone of disappointment and reproach.—"Not love you!" repeated Leonard: "Oh! how cruel of you thus to speak!"—and again snatching her to his bosom, he covered her lips and cheeks with kisses—kisses which she as fondly and as passionately returned. "Yes: Ellen, you know that I love and adore you!" he added in a voice of the tenderest sincerity.—"And I am not ashamed, Leonard, to give you a reciprocal assurance," said the young wife of another. "Oh! wherefore should I attempt to restrain my natural feelings? Believe me that I am much changed since last we met: I no longer see things in the same light. For, to speak candidly, I have a deep conviction of the disgrace of having been sold and bought for that dross which men so much prize. I cannot help the thoughts that steal upon me; and therefore it is that I have long ceased to look upon my father with respect. I feel that he sacrificed me—me, his only daughter, whom he might have made so happy! I feel also that he who is my husband hesitated not to immolate the hopes of my youth to his own selfishness. These are sad—nay, terrible thoughts, Leonard: but I again assure you that I cannot combat against them. It is true that my father is now rich and prosperous, and that he sometimes thanks me as the authoress of his fortunes: true also is it that my husband treats me with the utmost kindness. But never—never ought I to have been placed in the position to receive such thanks from the one, nor such kindness from the other: for, between them, they have wrecked my happiness, blighted my hopes, ruined all my youthful dreams of felicity. There are times, then, when I feel as if it would be a relief to fly from the neighbourhood of a father whom I am almost compelled to look upon as an enemy, and from the arms of a husband who is loathsome to me!"—As she uttered these last words, in a low tone but with a bitter emphasis, Ellen bent her countenance—her burning countenance—over her lover's hand, which she pressed to her lips.—"Then you would fly with me even now, dearest," he said, in a voice rendered tremulous by indescribable emotions, "did circumstances permit me to accompany you?"—Ellen made no verbal answer; but the rapturous manner in which she again pressed his hand to her rich, red mouth was a sufficiently significant response—"Alas! that may not be," resumed Leonard mournfully; and now the young lady absolutely shuddered in his arms, as if an ice-chill had suddenly fallen upon a heart an instant before so warm with passion. "No—that may not be," continued Leonard, determined not to leave her

in the least degree of suspense. "Behold this uniform—a uniform which is accursed under all circumstances, not only on account of the soul-crushing, merciless discipline and degrading servitude of which it is the badge, but also because it constitutes the barrier to the wishes which you so generously intimated and which I so enthusiastically share."—"But your discharge can be purchased, can it not?" asked Ellen, bending down her head to conceal her deep blushes.—"When I enlisted, Ellen," solemnly and mournfully replied Leonard, "I swore within myself an oath—an oath ratified by all I deem sacred in heaven and by all my hopes of an hereafter—to follow the course of this new destiny which I carved out for myself, and, if possible, to rise to distinction in this service which I dare not quit. I was young when I made that vow; and the hope which dictated it never will be fulfilled;—for the English soldier is a serf—a slave, and the idea of rising—ha! ha!"—and Leonard laughed wildly. "At all events," he added hastily, and again assuming a solemn tone, "I respect the oath that I took; and you, who love me, will not counsel me to break it. But we can see each other often, Ellen—we can meet, as we have met to-night.—"—"Then with that assurance must I content myself, Leonard!" interrupted the impassioned young lady, in whom, as the reader may have surmised, the hand of affliction, the tyranny of a parent, and the selfishness of the old man who bought her with his gold, had deadened those delicate feelings and even undermined the virtuous principles which had characterised her in her days of happy innocence.—"Yes," returned Leonard, "with that understanding must we endeavour to console ourselves! And now, my beloved one, it is time for me to leave you: remember," he added bitterly, "that though a man in years, I belong to a service where I am treated as a child and limited to particular hours."—"Would to God that you were emancipated from this dreadful thralldom!" exclaimed Ellen, weeping.—"Nay, I was wrong to say aught to afflict you," returned Leonard, embracing her tenderly. A few minutes more did they pass together, exchanging the most passionate caresses and earnest protestations of unalterable affection; and when they separated at last, it was not without having arranged for another meeting at an early day.

It would be scarcely possible to describe the feelings which animated the young lovers as they respectively hastened to their abodes—the one to his barracks, the other to her home. As we have before stated, circumstances had so warped Ellen's mind, that she paused not even to reflect for an instant upon the dangerous course on which she had entered: she had no longer any ties to bind her with filial love to her father—and she never had any bond of affection to link her to her husband. Therefore all she now thought of, or cared to think of, was that she had recovered a lover whom she adored; and she would have ridiculed and laughed at the idea of disgrace and of a ruined reputation, had any friend counselled her in the matter. On his side, Leonard was less hardened—for such indeed is the term which might be applied to Ellen's state of mind—to the consequences of this new phase of his existence. He shuddered at the thought of inducing a young wife to conduct herself in a manner so injurious to her husband's happiness; and he resolved, in his calmer moments, that when

he met Ellen again, according to the appointment already arranged, he would represent to her the necessity of their eternal separation. But when they did meet, and in a secluded place, she appeared so ravishingly beautiful, and spoke with so much tenderness, and seemed so completely happy in his society, and was withal so unfeignedly loving, that he could not bring himself to give utterance to the words that trembled upon his tongue—words that would have chased away those charming smiles, dimmed with tears the lustre of those melting eyes, hushed with sighs that language of fervid passion, and changed to dark despair all that bright and glowing bliss. Therefore they separated a second time with an arrangement to meet again:—and on the occasion of the third interview Leonard found himself less disposed than before to make a representation which would be fatal to the happiness of both. To be brief, interview succeeded interview, Leonard resolving that each one should be the last,—until at length love's dalliance became irresistible in its consequences; and, opportunity serving in all respects, the lovers were criminal! From that day forth Leonard thought no more of the impropriety of their meetings, which thereafter grew more frequent and longer in duration.

We shall here interrupt the thread of our narrative for a brief space, in order to make a few observations upon the condition of the private soldier. And, in the first instance, let us record our conviction that there is not a more generous-hearted, a nobler-minded, or a more humane set of men breathing than those who constitute the ranks of the British Army; while there is not a more tyrannical, overbearing, illiberal, and self-sufficient class than that composed of the officers of this army. But how is the latter fact to be accounted for? Because the Army is the mere plaything of the Aristocracy—a means of providing for the younger sons of noblemen, and enabling titled mammas to show off their striplings in red coats. What opinion can we have of the constitution of the army, so far as the officers are concerned, when we find Prince Albert suddenly created a Field-Marshal? * Such a spectacle is nauseating in the extreme; and the German must have execrably bad taste, or else be endowed with inordinate conceit, to hold the *baton* of a Marshal when he has not even the military knowledge of a drummer-boy. Since the Army is thus made a mere tool in the hands of a rascally Aristocracy, what sympathy can possibly exist between the officers and the men? The former look upon the latter as the scum of the earth—mere slaves on a level with shoe-blacks; and hence the barbarous cry of "Flog! flog! flog!" But there is no love lost between the classes: for the soldiers hate and abhor their officers, whom they naturally and most justly look upon as their tyrants and oppressors. It is enough to make the blood boil with indignation to think that those fine, stalwart, gallant fellows should be kicked about at the caprice of a wretched ensign or contemptible cornet just loosened from his mamma's apron-strings,—or bullied by older officers whose only "excellence" is their relationship to nobility, and their power to obtain promotion *by purchase*. The generality of the officers in the British Army

are nothing more nor less than a set of purse-proud bloodhounds, whose greatest delight is to behold the blood streaming down the backs of those men who alone win their country's battles. When the Duke of York (who was a humane man, though as great a scamp as ever had a COLUMN OF INFAMY erected to his memory) limited corporal punishment to 300 lashes, the full amount was invariably inflicted in nineteen out of twenty cases: but even this would not satisfy the bloodhounds, who annoyed and pestered the Duke on the subject to such an extent that he was literally bullied into empowering them to hold General Regimental Courts-Martial, by whose decision 500 lashes might be administered to the unhappy victim. For years and years was the torture of military flogging in England a shame and a scandal to all Europe; and it was absolutely necessary that a fine fellow should be murdered at Hounslow by the accursed lash, before the barbarous Government would interfere. All the world knows that a BRITISH SOLDIER was murdered in this revolting manner, and in the presence of his horror-stricken comrades: for be it remembered that when these appalling spectacles take place, the eyes that weep and the hearts that grow faint are those of the soldiers—never of the officers!

Again we ask, then, what sympathy can possibly exist between the privates and those in command? None: the soldiers would be more grovelling than spaniels if they could possibly kiss the hands that cuff them, or lick the shoes of those who kick and spurn them. The British soldier has his feelings as well as others—aye, and his spirit too; and he feels the iron of a cruel discipline and a heartless system rankling in his very soul. The celebrated John Wilkes was wont to say, "The very worst use you can put a man to, is to hang him." We agree with the *dictum*: but we aver in addition that it is an equally vile use to flog him. In fact, the whole treatment of the soldier, from the day of his enlistment until that of his discharge, is one continuous system of tyranny. Deception is made use of to ensnare him into the service—a crushing despotism is maintained to render him a docile, pliant tool while he is in it—and the basest ingratitude marks his departure from it, when he is turned adrift on the world without a penny to help him. The infamy commences with the recruiting serjeant—is perpetuated by all the officers—and is consummated by the Government. Take the case of Leonard Mitchell in respect to enlistment. The young man was assured by the recruiting serjeant that his pay would be a guinea a-week: it however turned out to be only 9s. 4d., from which 5s. 10d. were stopped for messing and washing, 2s. 7½d. for clothes, and 3½d. for articles to clean his uniform with—leaving 7d. per week, or one penny a-day, for pocket-money! And this is the condition of a British dragoon—with less pocket-money than a school-boy receives from his parents!

The Government relies upon the fidelity of the Army from the fact that it is officered by the scions of the aristocracy, who are of course interested in upholding all kinds of abuses. Hence the belief which the Government entertains that in case of a popular convulsion the troops would be certain to fire upon the people. But, in spite of the lordlings and aristocratic offshoots who command the army, we firmly believe that it all depends upon the cause in which such popular convulsion might arise, whether the troops would really massacre their

* This mighty warrior ran away from London when danger was apprehended in consequence of the glorious democratic meeting of 250,000 enlightened working men, at Finsbury Common, on the 10th of April, 1848.

civilian-brethren. If it were a glorious and just struggle for rights pertinaciously withheld and privileges doggedly refused, the Army would not act against the people. Even the Government itself has fears on this head, ignorant though it be of the real state of feeling anywhere save in the circles of the oligarchy;—for on a recent occasion* when tremendous military preparations were made to resist an expected outbreak of the working-men of London, the Government set policemen in plain clothes to act as spies in respect to the private soldiers. These spies threw themselves in the way of the soldiers, enticed them into public-houses, plied them with drink, and, in an apparently frank and off-hand manner, questioned them as to their political opinions. Some of the gallant privates, thus treated and interrogated, and little thinking that they were in the fangs of the Government *mouchards*, candidly expressed their sympathy with the popular cause, and as generously declared that they would sooner cut their hands off than draw a trigger against the people—adding, “The working-men and the soldiers are brethren.” What was the consequence? The spies followed those brave and open-hearted men home to their barracks, and laid information against them; so that numbers of British soldiers, thus shamefully entrapped, found themselves suddenly placed under arrest. Their commanding officers did not dare bring them to punishment; but they are doubtless marked men, and will be persecuted with all imaginable rancour and bitterness. To conclude this portion of our observations, we must remark that if any disturbance had really occurred on the great public occasion now especially alluded to, the troops were resolved not to fire upon the people; but they were equally determined to avenge themselves most signally upon the police.†

The day has gone by for the British soldier to permit himself to be made the tool of despotism: he will not be behind the French soldier in noble sentiments, generous conduct, and enlightened feelings, any more than he is inferior to him in bravery or discipline. But the British soldier must have his wrongs boldly proclaimed and speedily redressed. In many, if not in most regiments, the love of self-improvement is looked upon by the officers as a crime; whereas reading should be encouraged as much as possible. The barrack-room should be made more comfortable: at present it is so miserable and cheerless, that the private soldier is driven to the public-house in spite of his better inclinations. In many instances, men have become drunkards from this very fact, and are then entered in the Proscribed List; though all this might be avoided, were they encouraged to remain and pass their evenings at home. The food provided for the mess-

tables is seldom of a good description, and frequently of the very worst: the meat especially is too often of the vilest kind, and unfit for human food. Yet the poor soldier dares not complain—no, not even in respect to that for the supply of which he is so heavily mulcted out of his miserable pittance. Drunkenness even every now and then is a heinous crime in respect to the private soldier; whereas the veriest stripling that was ever dubbed ensign or cornet, may get as tipsy as an owl every night of his life with utter impunity. In fine, the condition of the British soldier is wretched in the extreme; and while the officer, who buys his rank, enjoys every privilege and riots in luxury and dissipation, the unfortunate private, who is basely inveigled into the service by a damnable fraud, is persecuted for the slightest offence, and treated on all occasions as a mere dog.

And now to return to our narrative. Six months elapsed; and during that period Leonard and Ellen met as often as the duties of the former would permit, while the latter cared not to what extent her husband's suspicions were aroused by her frequent and unaccountable absences from home. And that the old man did speedily entertain the most heart-rending suspicions, was a fact: but if he questioned his wife, she either took refuge in a stubborn silence, or answered him in a manner that only provoked him the more. Pride prevented him from complaining to her father; and he felt that he was now righteously punished for his selfishness in sacrificing the happiness of the fair young creature to his own desires. At length, unable any longer to endure the tortures of uncertainty, and anxious to know the worst at once, or else acquire the conviction that he had misjudged his wife altogether, he watched her movements: but she, aware of his proceeding, and without affecting to notice it, adopted such precautions as completely to outwit her husband, and to hold meetings with her lover, undiscovered as before. Up to this period—nearly three years and a half—the young man had conducted himself in his regiment with the utmost steadiness: he had never been reported—never incurred the slightest reprimand from his superiors. This was an extraordinary case, inasmuch as the private soldier has so many persons to please: first, the corporal—then the serjeant—then the serjeant-major—then the subaltern of the troop—next the captain—and lastly the commanding-officer. No—not *lastly*: for he must likewise please the Regimental Serjeant-Major, the Adjutant, and the Riding Master. Well, all these difficult objects had Leonard accomplished with success; and he was likewise beloved by all his comrades. He was ever in barracks of an evening at the proper hour; and during the first six months of his amour with Ellen, not even her sweet society had caused him to be late.

We must state that the more completely to enjoy the company of her lover, Ellen Gamble had taken a furnished lodging in the neighbourhood of his barracks; and there they were wont to meet. The landlady of the place asked no questions, her rent being regularly paid, and so little use being made of the apartments. It was Ellen's delight to provide succulent suppers for Leonard; and these he did not hesitate to partake of with her: but as for direct pecuniary assistance—when once she had offered it in as delicate a manner as possible, he refused it with so much firmness and with such a glowing countenance that she did not again allude to

* The memorable day of the 10th of April, 1848.

† With deep sorrow and indignation we have frequently noticed blackguard boys and dirty vagabonds insult private soldiers in the streets. Nothing can be more reprehensible than such conduct as this; but we are sure that the British soldier is too enlightened and too generous-hearted to suppose that any respectable working-man would treat him with indignity. There is and ought to be a deep sympathy between the military and the operative classes,—both alike being diabolically oppressed by the aristocratic and wealthy classes, and both having rights to claim, privileges to acquire, abuses to rectify, and tyranny to subdue. In the name of common sense and common justice, let no insult ever be offered to the private soldier who conducts himself properly.

the subject. One evening,—it was at the expiration of the six months already alluded to—the conversation had become more than ordinarily interesting to the pair—the supper was later than usual—and Ellen had ordered a bottle of champagne by way of an additional treat. Leonard was remarkably temperate in his habits; and the wine excited him considerably. He was not however tipsy—only very much animated; and the time passed away more rapidly than the lovers had imagined. At length, a neighbouring clock proclaimed the hour when Leonard should be in quarters: and, starting up, he snatched a hasty embrace, and hurried away. He reached the barracks ten minutes after the proper time; and as he was traversing the yard, deeply regretting that he should be even such a trifle too late, he met a young cornet who had only joined the regiment six weeks previously. “Holloa, you sir!” cried Lord Satinet; for such was the officer’s appellation: “what the devil do you mean by coming in at this hour?”—Leonard, perceiving that his lordship was so tipsy as to be scarcely able to stand, endeavoured to get away without making any answer.—“Stop there, damn your eyes!” exclaimed the nobleman. “What’s your number? Oh! B 57. Very well. But, damn your eyes!” repeated his lordship; “you’re drunk—as drunk as a beast, I declare.”—“I am not, my lord!” cried Leonard, indignantly: and again he made for the door leading to his quarters.—“You infernal scoundrel!” vociferated the splendid specimen of aristocracy, flying into a furious passion: “how dare you tell me you are not drunk? Why, curse you, you can hardly stand.” It was his lordship, however, who staggered.—“I am sober, my lord,” replied Leonard, still keeping his temper: “and pray permit me to inform your lordship that I *once* was a gentleman, and that your lordship might have a little more consideration for a person so unfortunately circumstanced as I am!”—“A gentleman *once*!” repeated Lord Satinet, with an ironical laugh: “a pretty gentleman, I’ll be bound! Your father was a costermonger, I suppose; and your mother an apple-woman? A gentleman, indeed! Why, damn your eyes, you’ll be telling me you were a nobleman next. A gentleman, by the powers! a splendid gentleman! Of the swell-mob, most likely.”—“Were I now as I was three years and a half ago, my lord,” said Leonard, scarcely able to master his passion, “you would not dare to address me thus.”—“Holloa! you threaten me, eh!” cried Lord Satinet. “Come, sir: tramp off to the guard-room; and I’ll teach you what it is to insult your officer, and be damned to you!”

Poor Leonard was compelled to obey: but the mere circumstance of being forced to restrain his boiling indignation, gave him such an excited appearance, that when he arrived at the guard-room the serjeant on duty immediately accused him of having been drinking. Leonard scorned to utter a falsehood; and he did not therefore deny the fact: but he declared that he was not inebriated—a statement which was treated with ridicule. To be brief, he was kept in custody for three days, at the expiration of which a court-martial assembled to try him. Lord Satinet made out the case as black as possible against the unfortunate young man, who in his defence most unwisely but very truly averred that his lordship himself was excessively tipsy on the occasion referred to. The nobleman denied the statement with much apparent indignation; and

the judge-advocate declared that Leonard Mitchell had materially aggravated his own enormity by such an accusation—although the very officer who thus fulfilled the judicial functions could of himself have proved, had he chosen, that Lord Satinet *was* particularly disguised in liquor on the night in question. The result of that hideous mockery of a trial was that the accused was pronounced *guilty* of returning home late in a condition of extreme intoxication, and of grossly insulting and even menacing his officer. Leonard Mitchell was accordingly condemned to receive three hundred lashes with the cat-o’nine-tails: he was then removed to the black hole, where he passed a night scarcely enviable even by a man about to suffer the extreme penalty of the law. For, oh! how could he ever again look the world in the face?—how should he dare meet his much-loved Ellen? how survive this deep disgrace—this flagrant shame—this damning infamy? But we dare not pause to analyse the thoughts or describe the feelings of the wretched young man during the interval between his condemnation and the execution of the sentence.

The fatal moment arrived when the gallant British soldier, stripped naked to the waist, was tied up to receive the torture of the lash, in the presence of the entire regiment, which was marshalled for the purpose. Leonard’s face was ashy pale—but the compressed lip, sternly-fixed eye, and determined expression of countenance indicated his resolution to meet the horrible punishment with as much courage as he could invoke to his aid. On many an eyelash in the ranks did the tear of sympathy—aye, of deep, deep commiseration tremble: but the officers looked on, the elder ones without emotion—the younger with curiosity, but with no better feeling. As for Cornet Lord Satinet—he could scarcely conceal his delight at the inhuman spectacle which he himself had caused to be enacted; and he thought what a “lion of the party” he should prove in the evening at his father’s house, when detailing to his noble mamma and his dear sisters the particulars of the military flogging of the morning. But, hark! the drums beat—and the accursed torture commences!—the first blow is inflicted—and nine long livid marks appear upon the back of the victim. Still he winces not—and not a murmur escapes his lips. Again does the lash fall—and of a livelier red are the traces it leaves behind. A third time the instrument of torture descends—and now blood is drawn. But still the young man is silent—although his well-knit frame moves with a slight convulsiveness. A shudder—passing throughout the long ranks like an electric shock, from flank to flank—denotes the horror—the profound, intense horror, which strikes to the hearts of the brave dragoons who behold the appalling laceration of their comrade. And now faster falls each murderous weapon—for there are two executioners employed at the same time: and when they have dealt a certain number of blows, they are relieved by others, so that the victim may gain nothing by the slightest weariness of arm on the part of his torturers. Still he maintains a profound silence: but he cannot prevent his countenance from expressing a keen sense of the mortal agony that he endures. Down—down comes the horrible weapon, each stroke inflicting *nine* distinct blows; and, while the blood streams forth in many crimson rivulets, the knotted cords carry away pieces of the palpitating

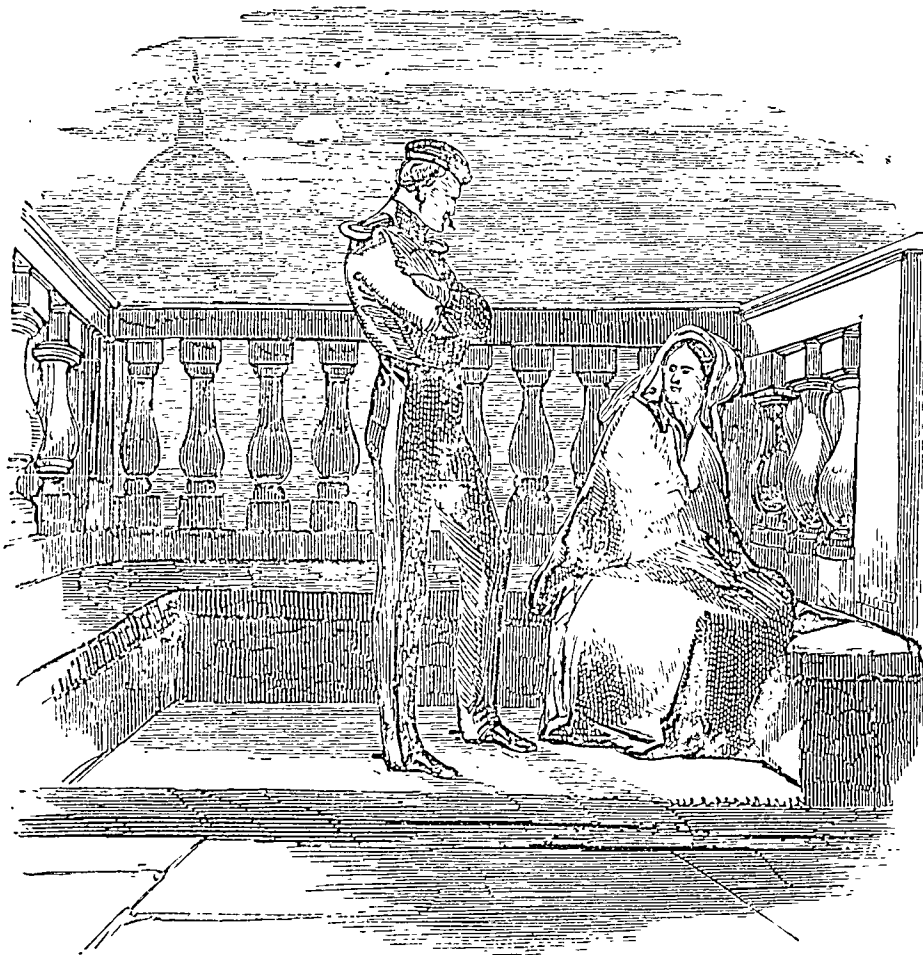
flesh. Oh! that such infernal cruelty should be perpetrated in a country vaunted as the chosen land of freedom, and peopled by beings who boast their humanity!—Oh! that such a blood-thirsty torture should be sanctioned by the laws of a nation paying upwards of ten millions a-year for the maintenance of the ministers of Christ! Gracious God! do thy thunders sleep when a creature fashioned after thine own image is thus enduring the torments of the damned,—torments inflicted not in a paroxysm of rage, and by the hand of a savage individual vengeance,—but in cold blood, in unprovoked mercilessness, and under colour of a sanguinary law which would disgrace a community of savages! People of England! let us blush—let us hang down our heads for very shame when we reflect that such appalling scenes are enacted amongst us; or rather let us gnash our teeth with rage—and tear our hair—and beat our breasts, to think that we are unable to compel our legislators to receive even a scintillation of that humane spirit which animates ourselves. For we have a Society to prevent cruelty to animals—and the man who beats his ox or his ass too severely, is punished; and if a poor man only happens to jostle against a police-officer, it is construed into a *savage assault* and attended with penalties. But there is no Society to prevent cruelty to human beings; and the lash—the accursed lash may be used, until the blood flows down the back—the skin is flayed away—deep wails are made in the quivering form—morsels of palpitating flesh are torn off—and the muscles are laid bare,—oh! all this may be done—all these revolting atrocities may be perpetrated—all these hellish cruelties may be accomplished, and there is no Association patronised by Royal Highnesses, Bishops, and Noble Lords, to interfere in behalf of the victims nor to punish the offenders!

Leonard Mitchell bore his murderous punishment as bravely as man could endure such fiendish torture. A hundred and fifty lashes had been inflicted, without eliciting a moan from his lips: but his countenance betrayed all the intensity of the anguish which he suffered. His eyes lost their lustre—his under-jaw fell slightly—there was foam upon his mouth—and his tongue protruded somewhat. As for his back—But, perdition seize upon the blood-hounds! the indignation which we feel at this moment will not allow us to extend *that* portion of the painful description. Better—oh! better far to be the vilest beggar that ever grovelled in the mire, than one of those Greenacres of the House of Commons who advocate corporal punishment, or those Burkers of colonels who delight in having it inflicted! As for poor Leonard Mitchell, he received upwards of two hundred lashes without a murmur; and then the surgeon ordered a pause. Drink was given to him—and he revived. But was he then removed? Oh! no—no: the feast of blood was not accomplished—the cup of gore was not full enough—the sum of human tortures was not finished. Again fell the accursed weapon: and now—we know not whether it were that after a brief cessation the agony of the renewal was more intense than before—or that the interval of rest had allowed the fine spirit of the man to flag,—whatever were the cause, it is nevertheless a fact that a piercing shriek of anguish burst from his lips—a shriek so strange, so wild, and so unnatural, that long, long after did it ring in the ears of those who heard it; for it seemed to lacerate the very brain as, in its

horrible inflections, the rending sound was sent back from the barrack walls in penetrating echoes and frightful reverberations. A thrill of horror electrified the startled ranks of the victim's comrades; and the gloved hand of many a brave soldier was drawn rapidly across the countenance, to dash away the tears that trembled on the quivering eyelids. For, oh! the British warrior may indeed well weep at such a scene,—weep—weep with mingled shame and sorrow—weep, too, with bitterness and indignation!

The punishment was over: soon as that piercing scream had died away, the prisoner fainted;—and he was forthwith hurried to the infirmary, where many hours elapsed ere he came to his senses. Then he awoke to consciousness amidst the most horrible tortures: for the means that were adopted to prevent his lacerated back from mortifying, inflicted the agonies of hell. Only fancy, Christian reader—a man in this country can be beaten into such a state that it is ten to one whether he will not die of his wounds, and all the surgeon's art can with difficulty resuscitate him! But pass we over the lingering illness endured by the unhappy Leonard—an illness of eight long weeks; and let us see whether the tortures of the lash have made him a better man. Alas! far from it! His fine spirit was broken: he saw that it was useless to endeavour to be good—that it was ridiculous to practise virtues which experienced no reward. His religious faith was shaken—nay, almost completely destroyed; and he no longer believed in the efficacy of prayer. Instead of harbouring feelings of a generous philanthropy, he began to loathe and detest his superiors and look with suspicion on his equals. A doggedness of disposition, a recklessness of character, a species of indifference as to what might become of him, displaced all those fine qualities and noble attributes that had previously graced him. For he felt that he was a marked man in his regiment, and never could hope for promotion—that his character was gone—and that, like Cain, he bore about him the brand of indelible infamy. Moreover, he longed for vengeance—bitter, bitter vengeance upon that young scion of the aristocracy who had lied against him—lied foully as only such a wretch could lie—and who had brought down all that disgrace on his devoted head.

In such a frame of mind was it that Leonard Mitchell met Ellen for the first time after a separation of nearly ten weeks. The young lady had learnt the misfortunes which had befallen her lover; and she was prepared, by an intimate knowledge of his character, to hear that he had been accused as unjustly as he had been punished savagely. She endeavoured to console him: but he assured her broadly and frankly that the only solace he could ever know was—*vengeance*! Ellen did not discourage this idea—did not rebuke this craving; for she also felt bitterly—bitterly against the despicable lordling who had persecuted him so foully. It was, nevertheless, with sorrow that she soon observed the alteration which had taken place in his disposition. He was still devoted to her: but his passion now partook rather of a gross sensuality than of the refinement of love. How could it be otherwise? The best feelings of the man were blunted; and his brute impulses, unchecked by that delicacy of sentiment which had once so peculiarly characterised him, became the more violent. Especially did he soon manifest a loving for intoxicating liquors; and at the third or fourth interview



with Ellen, after his release from the hospital, he suffered her to understand pretty plainly that he should no longer refuse pecuniary assistance at her hands. In the course of a few weeks he spoke out more plainly still, and unblushingly asked for the amount he required at the time; and ere many months had passed away he never parted from her without receiving a portion of the contents of her purse. At first she herself was much shocked at this evidence of an altered disposition: but she was so deeply—so devotedly attached to him, that she reasoned herself into consolation even on that head; and the more selfish he became, the more anxious did she appear to minister to his wants. This was not all: for frequent intoxication irritated his temper—and he did not hesitate to vent his ill humour upon her. Sometimes, too, he failed to keep his appointments with her: and when they did meet at last, he abused her if she dared to reproach him. On one occasion he actually raised his hand to strike her; but the poor, loving creature, falling on her knees at his feet, turned up towards him a countenance so tearful and woe-begone, that the coward blow was stayed, and he implored her pardon. Never-

theless, she had received a shock which she could not forget: neither could she avoid contrasting the Leonard Mitchell, whom military punishment had degraded, to the same level as the orates, with the Leonard Mitchell who formerly appeared the very type of a gallant, generous-hearted, and high-minded British Bragoon.

But Leonard Mitchell must not be blamed if his manners and habits were thus changed, and if he took inveterately to drinking. He was one of these whom bad laws had forced into evil courses; and if he flew to the intoxicating glass, it was because the alcoholic liquor contained the hours of oblivion. Persecuted as he had been—degraded as he felt himself, existence had become intolerable unless he lost the consciousness of at least a portion of it. His comrades noticed the alteration which had taken place in him, and they well understood the cause: for it had been the same with every one who had ever undergone the torture and the disgrace of the lash. In his sober hours Leonard experienced no remorse—no compunction for the ways which he was pursuing: he had grown dogged—morose—indifferent;—no—; not altogether indif-

ferent,—for he cherished—dearly, deeply cherished a scheme of vengeance. And the day and the hour for carrying it into execution arrived at last.

It was, indeed, on the anniversary of the memorable morning of his degrading punishment, that a grand review took place in Hyde Park. Certain German pauper Princes were on a visit to this country,—princes who received annual incomes from the English Treasury, heaven only knows for what services performed—and whose very travelling expenses to and from the Court of St. James's were duly paid from the public purse;—for those contemptible petty sovereigns of Germany are as mean as they are poor, and as proud as they are both mean and poor! Well, it was on the occasion of the presence of two or three of those princely beggars in the British metropolis, that the grand review took place. All the troops quartered in or near London were marched shortly after ten o'clock in the morning to Hyde Park; and as the day was remarkably fine, the spectacle was brilliant and imposing. The Duke of Wellington, the German Princes, and several General-officers, attended by a numerous staff, shortly afterwards appeared upon the ground: and the road was thronged with spectators. The review commenced in the usual manner: the entire force, infantry and cavalry, was drawn up to receive the Duke, the Princes, and their companions;—and after the inspection and the "marching past," various evolutions and manœuvres were practised. A sham fight was then ordered; and the troops were accordingly separated for the purpose into two divisions. The appearance of the dragoon regiment in which Leonard Mitchell served attracted general notice, not only on account of the reputation it had acquired of containing some of "the finest men in the British army, but likewise in consequence of its discipline and its perfection in the evolutions already practised. But had some searching eye scanned each individual countenance, there was one in that regiment which would have rivetted the gaze: for, though strikingly handsome, there was then upon that countenance an expression of fiend-like satisfaction and sardonic triumph—and the portentous gaze, the curling lip, and the dilation of the nostrils on the part of the dragoon thus alluded to, would have convinced the observer that the man's thoughts were intent on some sinister design.

And now the sham-fight commences;—and there is advancing and retreating by turns—and there are echelons and deployings, and other evolutions—until a general attack commences on the side of the assailing party. The dragoons are armed with their carbines; and Leonard Mitchell grasps his weapon with an ardour—an affection—a species of gratitude, as if it were about to render him some signal service. The order is given to fire; and the carbines vomit forth volumes of white, vapoury smoke, which in a moment envelopes the entire corps. But from the midst of the cloud a piercing scream—a scream of mortal agony—breaks forth; and then, as the smoke moves slowly away on the lazy wing of the partial breeze, ejaculations of horror and dismay announce that some accident has occurred. All is now confusion; but a report spreads through the dragoon regiment, and thence circulates like wildfire amidst the troops and the spectators, that Lord Satinet has been wounded in the sham-fight. And true enough was the rumour; for there lay the young nobleman, fallen from his

horse, and stretched bleeding and gasping on the green sward! The surgeon hastily proceeded to render all the assistance that human skill could administer: but the aid was vain and useless—the victim was mortally wounded by a bullet which had entered his back—and, without uttering an intelligible word, he shortly expired in the surgeon's arms. And now a sad and heart-rending scene took place: for the parents and the sisters of the murdered nobleman were upon the ground—and they hastened to the spot, guided by the common rumour which had appalled them, but which they hoped to find incorrect, or at all events fearfully exaggerated. They discovered, however, that it was, alas! too true; and the gala day was turned into one of bitter mourning for them. The review was broken up—and the troops were marched away to their respective barracks; while the spectators crowded to behold the sad procession that bore the corpse of the young noble to the family mansion in the neighbourhood.

During the return of the dragoon regiment to its quarters, those of Leonard's comrades who were near him frequently bent suspicious and enquiring glances upon him: but his countenance afforded no indication of guilt. He neither appeared triumphant nor downcast—neither nervous nor afraid; and the soldiers who thus beheld his calm and tranquil demeanour, were shaken in the idea which they had formed in respect to the authorship of the morning's tragedy. The moment the dragoons entered the barracks, every cartouche-box was examined; but in none was found aught save blank cartridges. The suspicions of the officers had naturally fallen upon Leonard Mitchell; and it was deemed necessary to place him under arrest until the coroner should have instituted the usual enquiry. But he energetically declared his innocence; and those who were the most ready to suspect him, were staggered by the sincerity which seemed to characterise his protestations, and by the indignation which he manifested at the crime imputed to him. On the ensuing day the inquest was held; and the result was favourable to Mitchell. No particle of evidence appeared to tell against him, unless indeed it were the fact that he had been flogged a year previously through the instrumentality of the deceased nobleman. But none of Leonard's comrades who were examined, could aver that they had ever heard him use a threatening expression in respect to Lord Satinet—no, not even in his cups, when the truth is so likely to slip from a man's lips and the real state of his feelings to be proclaimed by the tongue. That the nobleman's death was the result of an accident, was an alternative that could scarcely be adopted: for it was almost impossible that a ball-cartridge could have been mistaken for a blank one. Thus, though not a tittle of testimony could be brought against Leonard Mitchell,—and though he was discharged from custody,—yet in the minds of all the officers and of many of his comrades, there still dwelt a suspicion with regard to him. An open verdict was returned by the jury,—to the effect that "the deceased had met his death by a ball discharged from a carbine, but whether by accident or guilty intent, and by what hand, was unknown." A few days afterwards the remains of the young nobleman were consigned to the tomb; and the Tory newspapers, in passing an eulogium upon his character, grouped together such a variety

of admirable qualities, that if he had only possessed one-tenth of them, he must have been a phoenix of moral perfection and a prodigy of intellectual power.

The first meeting which took place between Leonard Mitchell and Ellen after the tragedy just related, was of a painful description. Scarcely were they alone together in the apartment which she had hired for these guilty interviews, when, seizing him violently by the wrist, and speaking in a low, thick tone—while her eyes looked fixedly and searchingly into the depths of his own—she said, "Leonard, is it possible that you have done this?"—"I told you that I would have vengeance," he replied, almost brutally, as he abruptly withdrew his arm from her grasp; "and you have even encouraged me in the project. Do you mean to reproach me now?"—"Oh! my God, it seems so horrible to contemplate!" cried Ellen, sinking into a chair, and pressing her hands to her throbbing brows: for, criminal—almost depraved, though she were, yet she was not so hardened as to be able to stifle the still small voice which whispered in her ears, "*Thou art the companion of a murderer!*"—"Horrible to contemplate!" repeated Leonard, with a brutal laugh. "You are a fool to talk in that style, Ellen. But perhaps you will go and betray me next?"—"Good heavens! how have I merited such treatment as this?" exclaimed the wretched woman, now bursting into a flood of tears. "Have I not sacrificed everything for you, Leonard?" she demanded, her voice broken with agonising sobs: "and can you find it in your heart to insult me thus? Oh! consider my position, and have mercy upon me! Tormented day and night by the suspicions and the increasing ill-humour of a husband whom I loathe and abhor—with the greatest difficulty avoiding the snares which he sets to entrap me, and to acquire proof of that infidelity which he even more than suspects—and subjected latterly to the questions and remonstrances of my father, who has at length obtained a knowledge of my frequent and unaccounted-for absences from home,—think you not that I am sufficiently unhappy, perplexed, and bewildered, without receiving insult and injury from you?"—"Then why do you provoke me?" demanded Leonard. "For a year past I have been constantly telling you that I would have vengeance; and, as I said just now, you have encouraged me in the idea. But now that it is consummated, and that my mortal enemy sleeps in a premature grave, you affect horror and disgust."—"Oh! Leonard," ejaculated Ellen, throwing herself at his feet, "pardon me, and I will offend you no more! I am well aware that the provocation was immense, and that there are circumstances in which human forbearance knows no limit—can acknowledge no restraint. Such was your position; and I was wrong to utter a word deprecatory of your conduct."—"Well, well," said Leonard, raising the infatuated woman from her suppliant posture, and placing her on the sofa by his side: "let us talk no more of this little quarrel between us. For you must be aware that I should have been worse than the spaniel which licks the hand that beats it, if I had not avenged myself on that miscreant lordling, whom my hatred accompanies even in his grave. And let me tell you, that in times of war, many and many an officer is picked off by some soldier who has felt the iron hand of despotism press upon him, or who has suffered from the effects of individual persecution. It may be

called *murder*, if you choose: but I look upon it as a *righteous retribution*."—Ellen gazed in mingled astonishment and horror, and with a ghastly pallor of countenance, upon her lover's face, as he enunciated this dreadful doctrine: then, perceiving that he was again about to become angry, she hastened to caress him. He returned the amorous dalliance; but Ellen could no longer abandon herself wholly and entirely to the delights of illicit love. Though the course of life which she had for some time adopted had rendered her insatiably sensual, she now experienced a feeling of loathing and disgust when in contact with her lover. This feeling she strove hard to conquer, by conjuring up all the voluptuous ideas that had ever existed in her soul: but, in spite of this straining against nature, a voice of blood seemed to ring in her ears, warning her that she was in the arms of a murderer! She gazed upon his handsome countenance, in the hope that its beauty would inspire her with sentiments of a purer affection;—out his eyes appeared to oam with fiendish triumph and demoniac malignity;—and if she pressed his hand to her lips, it seemed as if she were kissing flesh stained with human gore.

Unable to endure these torturing feelings, she hastened to prepare the supper-table, and bade him draw the cork of a champagne-bottle. Full readily did he comply; and, having tossed off a bumper first, he refilled the same glass, saying, "Now drink from this, to convince me that you do not love me less on account of what has happened."—The lady took the glass and placed it to her lips: but the words he had just uttered, recalled so vividly to her mind those images which she had striven so forcibly to banish from her imagination, that an invincible feeling of disgust came over her—a blood-mist appeared to obscure her sight—and as she drank, it seemed as if a draught from a sanguine tide were pouring down her throat. Nevertheless, she forced herself to drain the glass; and as soon as the exciting liquor began to circulate in her veins, these horrible images rapidly disappeared, and she felt that she could now abandon herself to a voluptuousness of soul unmarred by disgust or loathing. Ellen, therefore, as well as Leonard, discovered that there were charms in the crystal cup filled with sparkling wine; and she drank the exciting juice with the avidity of one who knows full well its efficacy in banishing care. Leonard was both surprised and rejoiced to behold the influence which the nectar had upon her; and for a long time he had not appeared so tender and affectionate as he was during the latter part of this interview.

And what was the consequence of that evening's incidents? That Ellen took a liking to alcoholic liquor. She had discovered therein a panacea for disagreeable thoughts; and her reflections in serious moments were by no means of a pleasurable nature. Thus was it that she, who was lately so abstemious as scarcely to touch a drop of wine even after dinner, and who had so deeply deplored the weakness of Leonard in yielding to the insidious temptations of strong drink,—thus was it that she, the elegant and lovely Ellen, gave way to that same fascination, and sought solace in the sparkling glass. At first she touched no wine until the dinner-hour: but she soon found that all the morning and afternoon she was a prey to low spirits, distressing reflections, and feelings of mingled loathing and fondness in respect to Leonard; and she therefore made the mid-day luncheon an excuse for taking her first

glass. At dinner-time she would freely partake of her two or three glasses;—and on those evenings when she met Leonard, she indulged readily in the liquor provided for the supper-table. But as the habit rapidly gained upon the unfortunate young woman, she soon began to tittle sily at home; and, even before breakfast, she eventually found herself compelled by great mental depression to imbibe a dram. It was about this time that Mr. Gamble's intellects, racked and tortured for upwards of a year by the most harrowing suspicions and by the total estrangement of his wife's affections and even attentions, began to give way; and he would sit for hours together in his chair, with his eyes fixed upon vacancy. It was also at the same epoch that a turn once more manifested itself in Mr. Pomfret's affairs; and, a colossal speculation failing, he was again plunged into deep embarrassments. Further assistance from his son-in-law was out of the question; and Mr. Pomfret accordingly devoted all his energies to sustain the credit of his house in the hope that he might yet retrieve himself, or in any case postpone the catastrophe for as long a period as possible. Thus the condition of her husband and the constant application of her father to his business left Ellen almost totally free from any supervision; and she was enabled to indulge at will in the fatal habit that was gaining so rapidly upon her. Leonard did not fail to notice this growing attachment to liquor on her part; and he rather encouraged it than otherwise—for he himself had become utterly depraved and reckless, and when his mistress was in a maudlin condition of semi-ebriety, she cheerfully parted with all the contents of her purse. The increasing childishness of her husband gave her a greater command over his finances; and she was therefore the better able to supply her lover's extravagances. At length she acquired the certainty that Leonard was unfaithful to her; and a desperate quarrel was the consequence. Nor was the dispute confined to mere words; for the young man beat her unmercifully—and she, half intoxicated at the time, retaliated to the best of her ability. The scene was shocking and disgusting; and when Ellen awoke next morning, and reflected upon all that had occurred on the preceding evening, she wept bitter—bitter tears, as she compared the guilty present with the innocent past. Then she vowed to abstain from liquor in future, and to see Leonard Mitchell no more; and, temporarily strong in this resolution, she sent him a note communicating her design. Moreover, under the influence of the better feelings that were thus awakening within her soul, her heart smote her for her conduct towards her husband, who was daily becoming more dependant upon her kindness, and whom she had long neglected altogether. She even felt happy when she pondered upon her newly-formed determination to resume a steady course of life;—but all her salutary schemes and hopes were annihilated in the afternoon of that same day, by the arrival of a letter from Mitchell, threatening to murder her and kill himself afterwards unless she repaired in the evening to the usual place of meeting.

Over that letter Ellen wept scalding tears—for she knew that if she yielded now, her fate was sealed: ruin, degradation, and disgrace must inevitably await her! She saw herself again entering upon the path which would lead her to the condition of a confirmed drunkard; and the awful

menaces contained in the missive, filled her with presentiments that even her death might be premature and violent. Nevertheless, she had not the moral courage to resist the temptation of meeting her lover; and she consoled herself—or rather, she endeavoured to quiet her qualms of conscience and her presaging fears—by saying, "It shall be for the last time!" To the place of appointment she accordingly went; and Leonard Mitchell, who feared to lose a mistress possessed of such ample means to minister to his extravagances, played the hypocrite so admirably that Ellen—infatuated creature that she was!—believed in the sincerity of his protestations of undivided love for the future, and his regrets for the past. The wine-bottle circulated freely; and she forgot all her remorse—all her compunctions—all her resolves of reformation. She even went so far as to revive the proposal of purchasing Leonard's discharge; but to this he positively refused to accede. He quoted his oath as a reason: it was not however the correct one—for even that solemn vow had long ceased to have any influence upon his depraved and hardened mind. The truth was that he had become a confirmed voluptuary in respect to women; and he found that his uniform was an immense auxiliary towards success with the frivolous and giddy of the sex: moreover, he knew that were he released from the ranks, he should become completely tacked to the apron-strings of his mistress; and, as she held the purse, he would not in that case be able to exercise his independence. It therefore suited him better to remain in the army; and Ellen was foolish—infatuated enough to believe in the validity and genuineness of the motive which he alleged for declining her proposal. She accordingly forbore from pressing it; and the remainder of that evening was spent in voluptuous enjoyment—sensuality and champagne constituting the elements of that guilty pair's unhallowed pleasures.

Time passed on; and the position of the lovers—if such they could now be called—became daily more unhappy in respect to each other. Quarrels between them were of constant occurrence; and on each occasion blows were exchanged. The affection of Ellen had changed into a gross sensuality, having lost every particle of refining sentiment; and she became jealous in the extreme, frequently giving way to such fits of passion, when she reproached Leonard for his infidelities, that it was impossible to recognise in the furious, rabid, half-drunken demoness the mild, amiable, and chaste young lady of former years. She still retained her beauty to a marvellous degree, in spite of the deep potations in which she indulged and the slovenliness that had crept upon her in respect to dress; and, as she was frequently out in the streets late of an evening, after her interviews with Leonard, she was subjected to the licentious proposals of the "young men about town" who are ever on the look-out for pretty women. The result was that, although she yielded not to such temptations, her mind became more thoroughly depraved, by being robbed of every chastening thought and feminine reflection; for, when under the influence of liquor, she would frequently converse with the rakes who accosted her in the manner described. Leonard himself suddenly grew jealous; and, having followed her one evening, he caught her in discourse with a young gentleman whom she had encountered more than once during

her walks home. A dreadful scene ensued: and, though Leonard at length suffered himself to be appeased, simply because afraid of losing one whose purse was so convenient to him, he nevertheless entertained a firm but erroneous conviction of her infidelity. They therefore now harboured mutual distrust, which on many occasions rose into absolute loathing. Bad as Leonard was, and much as he had encouraged her in her drinking habits, he was nevertheless often disgusted when he beheld her reeling under the influence of liquor, and when he felt upon his face that breath which, now heated with alcoholic fluid, was once so pure and balmy. On her side, she could never divest herself of the remembrance that she was consorting with a murderer; and frequently—oh! how frequently, the blood-mist would reappear before her eyes, and the liquor would seem gore in her glass, and sanguine stains would, in her heated imagination, dye his hands! Thus wretchedly did their connexion progress,—she still clinging to him through that infatuation which often belongs to sensuality of soul—and he still tolerating her because she possessed the means of supplying his pocket.

At length matters had reached a crisis, at which the amour was destined to have a most tragical termination. Ellen was returning home one evening, smarting under some insult which her lover had put upon her, and labouring as usual under the influence of wine, when she met the young gentleman above alluded to. On this occasion his entreaties were more urgent than ever; and she was more pliant than he had as yet found her to be. Her blood was inflamed; and she was moreover in that humour when to assert her independence of Leonard, even to herself, would prove a solace and a comfort. She accordingly yielded to the proposals of the stranger, and accompanied him to an improper house. It was midnight when they issued forth; and Ellen hastened homeward, having made an appointment for another evening. In the middle of Waterloo Bridge she heard hasty steps approaching from behind: it was a clear, moonlit night—and, on turning her head, she beheld Leonard Mitchell close at hand. A faintness came over her: she instantly suspected—nay, felt certain that he had watched her;—and, trembling with terrible apprehensions, she sank upon a seat in one of the recesses. In another moment the young dragoon was by her side. For almost a minute he spoke not; and this silence augmented her alarm. Raising her pale—her haggard countenance, on which the moon-light streamed in all its chaste and silvery purity, she endeavoured to frame some question that would lead to an explanation of his presence there: but her lips refused utterance to the words that rose to them. A mortal terror was upon her—a consternation, as if she beheld the skeleton form of Death hovering dimly in the obscure distance.

Taking her hand, and pressing it with convulsive violence, Leonard said in a low and hollow tone, "Now, Ellen, I have at last obtained ample proof of your infidelity."—"Mercy! mercy!" murmured the young woman, as gazing rapidly up and down the bridge, she saw that it was completely deserted.—"Oh! I deserve it," exclaimed Leonard, beating his brow violently with his open palm: "I knew that I deserve it all! I have long entertained the suspicion that such was the case: but now that I have acquired the conviction, it seems too dreadful to bear! Again, however, I say that I deserve it:

and yet, bad—vile—depraved as I am, I feel as if my heart had received a mortal wound."—"I take Almighty God to witness, Leonard," cried Ellen in an impassioned tone, "that this is the first time I have been unfaithful to you. Your conduct of the evening wounded me so deeply, that I longed to avenge myself—longed also to assert my independence of you, even if only to the knowledge of my own heart. By this I mean that I should have felt triumphant in proving false to you, even though you yourself were to remain ignorant of the proceeding. And now if you will pardon me, I promise never to err again. But, O Leonard—Leonard, do treat me with: at least a little kindness!"—and as she uttered these words in a tone of deep feeling and profound pathos, she flung herself upon his breast, throwing her arms around his neck in a paroxysm of reviving fondness. So touching was her appeal, that it instantly brought to his soul an overwhelming cloud of reminiscences of all the harshness, brutality, and cowardly cruelty of which he had been guilty towards her,—reminiscences, too, of all her love for him—the sacrifices she had made for him—the generosity of her behaviour in his behalf. He recollected also—and all in a moment as it were—that if she were degraded by drink, and defiled by the hot breath of licentiousness, she was pure and chaste as a wife until he had sought her out on his return to London,—that her fall, in fine, might be unmistakably traced to her fatal connexion with him. Then, too, he recalled to mind his own condition when two years previously he had crossed that bridge on his way to snatch a glimpse of the three houses in Stamford Street,—a condition which, unenviable as he had then deemed it, was one of supreme happiness compared with his present state. For the mark of the branding lash was upon his back, and the remorse of a murderer was in his heart; and he knew himself to be a drunkard—a disgrace to his regiment—a vile wretch, rioting in pleasures purchased by the coin that he wrung from the woman whom he ill-treated and abused. And, lastly, his thoughts were reflected back to those times when all was bright and smiling before him—when he and Ellen were alike untainted by guilt, and the willing votaries of virtue—when their loves were innocent and chaste, and they would have started back in horror and indignation had it been prophesied to them that they were one day destined to look upon each other with disgust. All these recollections and reflections poured in, like an overwhelming torrent, upon the mind of the young dragoon; and his soul was softened—his heart, long so hard, was touched—and, melting into tears, as he felt the miserable woman clinging to him with resuscitated fondness, he pressed her to his bosom, exclaiming, "Ellen, I have wronged you deeply—deeply: but can you—can you forgive me?"

The reconciliation was complete; and then Ellen, animated by a sudden thought, exclaimed, "But, gracious heavens! Leonard, you have absented yourself from your quarters—and, hark! the clock strikes one."—The booming note of St. Paul's iron tongue had indeed fallen upon their ears while she was yet speaking.—"I dare not return to the barracks again," said Leonard; and she felt that he shuddered convulsively in her arms.—"But what will you do?" she asked, diffidently.—"Anything!" he cried: "anything! rather than be flogged again."—"Flogged!" repeated Ellen, now shuddering in

her turn.—“Yes: I should be assuredly condemned to that ignominy—that torture,” replied Mitchell. “My conduct has for some time been so unsteady, and I have been so often reported ‘late,’ that this time nothing could save me from the cat. I have determined not to return to the barracks,” he added, doggedly.—“But what will you do?” again asked Ellen.—“I know not,” he responded gloomily. “Unless I can find some secure place wherein to hide for a few days, until I may escape from the country, I cannot tell what will become of me.”—“And must you quit the country?” demanded Ellen.—“Would you have me taken up as a deserter?” asked Leonard bitterly. “My punishment in that case would be worse than if I were now to go back and submit to the result of a court-martial on charges of irregularity, drunkenness, and late hours.”—“Not for worlds would I have you return under present circumstances,” cried Ellen, in an impassioned tone: “much less have you eventually incur the danger of being arrested as a deserter. Leonard,” she added, after a few moments’ pause, “if you leave the country, I will go with you.”—“I thought that you would not abandon me,” exclaimed the dragoon, pressing her closer to him. Then he whispered something in her ears; and they conversed in a very low tone for several minutes. At length Ellen yielded to the plan which her lover had suggested, but which had at first seemed fraught with difficulties.—“Yes,” she said; “there is no alternative—I must conceal you at my house. And when I reflect, the two servants are devoted to me; you may suppose that I have all along bribed them heavily in order to induce them to wink at my irregularities; and if they refused to become Mr. Gamble’s spies in those times when he was in full possession of his intellects, they will not betray me now that he is half childish and does not question them concerning me any more. Yes: it must be so;—there is no choice left. Come at once: I possess the latch-key, and can admit you without even disturbing the servants. It will be sufficient to make confidants of them to-morrow.”

The reader may now understand that Ellen was about to consummate her imprudence by taking her paramour beneath her husband’s roof. When the first moments of dissolving softness and better feelings had passed away in respect to Leonard, his selfishness again asserted its empire; and, while determining to desert, he at the same time bethought himself how he could still make Ellen’s pecuniary means available for his own purpose. His object was therefore to gain admittance into the house—to ascertain the precise nature of her resources and find out the amount of valuables she could dispose of—and then induce her to elope with him, having previously plundered her husband and his dwelling of everything worth carrying off. We have seen how far his diabolical and hastily formed scheme succeeded. Two points were already gained: she would admit him into the house—and she had promised to accompany him to another country. The robbery, he felt assured, he should be enabled to reason her into: if not, menaces could be effectually employed, no doubt. Such was the design which the once upright and honourable Leonard Mitchell now had in view; and he chuckled inwardly at the scheme, as he walked arm-in-arm with Ellen towards Stamford Street. In ten minutes they reached Mr. Gamble’s house: Ellen opened the street-door by means of the latch-

key which she had about her;—and the dragoon passed, unobserved and noiselessly, to her bedroom—for during the past eighteen months she and her husband had occupied separate chambers. The remainder of that night glided away: in the morning Ellen admitted the two domestics to her confidence; and as she at the same time slipped a heavy bribe into their hands, they willingly promised devotion to her interests. The day passed heavily enough for the dragoon, who was accustomed to exercise and bustle, and who could not endure the idea of being pent up within the narrow limits of a bed-room. He accordingly determined to put the remainder of his scheme into execution without delay; and he rejoiced when night once more spread its sable wing over this hemisphere.

It was eleven o’clock: Mr. Gamble had long before retired to rest—the servants had likewise sought their chamber;—and Leonard was seated at table with Ellen in the bedroom of the latter. A succulent supper and rich wines were placed before them: the curtains were drawn carefully over the windows and a lamp diffused a mellow lustre throughout the apartment. Having eaten as much as he cared for, Leonard filled a tumbler with sherry, which he drank at a draught to inspire him with courage for the part which he had now to play—for, by fair or foul means, was he resolved to succeed. “Ellen,” said he, after a pause, “we must quit the house to-night.”—“To-night!” she exclaimed, in astonishment: “wherefore this hurry?”—“In the first place,” he replied, “because I cannot bear confinement here; and secondly, because it may as well be done now as a week or a month hence.”—“Let us postpone our departure until to-morrow night,” said Ellen, imploringly.—“Why so?”—“Because I have not seen my father for many days,” she answered: “he has been so much engaged in the City; and I should wish to bid him farewell for ever, if only mentally.”—“This is childish!” ejaculated Leonard impatiently. “I thought you had lost all respect for your father?”—“Oh! but I cannot forget that he is my father,” responded Ellen, the tears trickling down her cheeks: “and now that I have made up my mind to leave England for ever, I would embrace him once more.”—“Then I must depart without you,” said Leonard, rising from his chair.—“Oh! this is unkind to a degree!” urged Ellen bitterly. “Surely you can allow me four-and-twenty hours for the necessary preparations?”—“Our preparations can be made in an hour,” said Leonard obstinately: then, reseating himself, he drank off another tumblerful of wine. “Listen to me. What preparations have you to make, save to possess yourself of all the money, plate, jewels, and other valuables you can lay your hands upon?”—Ellen stared at her lover with the fixed gaze of mingled astonishment and horror.—“Well, what is the matter with you?” he demanded.—“Leonard, you are not in earnest?” she said at length: “you would not have me rob my husband of his plate?”—“Certainly,” replied the ruffian: “and of his watch, and every thing of value that is portable in the house. We must not go away empty-handed, I can tell you.”—“Is it possible that you would counsel me to do this?” asked Ellen, speaking in a low and agitated voice. “Leonard, I have never hesitated to supply you with money, because that is an article which I believe to exist in common between a husband and wife. Moreover, the household has suffered in no way by the appropriation of those sums to your

wants. But if you mean me to plunder my husband of his plate—his watch—and other things which are beyond all question his own exclusively, I declare once for all that I will not be a party to such a deed. It is sufficient," she added, tears now bursting from her eyes, "that I am what I am, without leaving behind me the reputation of a thief."—Leonard ground his teeth with rage: and again he had recourse to the wine-bottle.—"Pray recall the words that you have uttered," exclaimed Ellen: "tell me that you were joking, or that you only made the proposal in order to try me!"—"I never was more serious in my life," said Leonard, brutally.—"Oh! what do I hear?" cried the wretched woman, wringing her hands.—"Enough of this!" ejaculated the ruffian, starting from his seat. "Do you mean to accompany me, or do you not?"—"Yes, yes; I have pledged myself to *that*!"—"And are we to go empty-handed?"—"I have sixty or seventy pounds in money, and my jewels are worth as much more."—"And the plate?" demanded Leonard.—"Is always kept in a box beneath Mr. Gamble's bed; and therefore you see how impossible it is to obtain it, even if I were disposed to plunder him of property which has been in his family for so many, many years."

Leonard reseated himself—poured out more wine—drank it—and then fell into a deep meditation. Ellen watched his countenance, flattering herself that the reason she had alleged for forbearance in respect to the plate would prove efficient. But she had only confirmed the ruffian in his resolution to possess it; inasmuch as she had committed herself in two ways. Firstly, she had told him where it was; and secondly, by informing him that it had been in the family for many years, she had naturally left on his mind the impression that it was of considerable value—for heir-looms of that species are usually costly. What, then, was Leonard Mitchell really thinking of—thinking of, too, under the influence of the deep potations which he had imbibed? He was revolving a hellish project in his mind. If he endeavoured to possess himself of the plate contrary to the assent of Ellen, a disturbance would ensue in the house, and his arrest as a deserter might follow upon the discovery of his presence there. To depart without the plate was not at all suitable to his purposes: for if he repaired to a foreign country, it would not be to toil for a livelihood. How, then, was he to secure the coveted property, and carry it away without the chance of noise or detection? Only if Ellen were removed from his path! Yes—*this* was the project now revolved in the mind of the lost, depraved young man; and, having again fortified himself with liquor, he determined to put his diabolical scheme into execution. Suddenly rising from his seat, he approached Ellen, and, taking her hand, said, "Forgive me, dearest, for what I dared to utter just now. We will delay our departure until to-morrow night; and then you shall take with you just so much as you choose to select, and nothing more."—"I freely pardon you, Leonard," she replied; and yet, as he bent over her, there was a wild gleaming in his eye and a peculiarity of expression in his countenance which caused vague apprehensions to sweep across her mind. "But how strangely you regard me, Leonard," she said: "is anything the matter with you?"—"Nothing, nothing, dearest," he responded, throwing his arms round her neck and pressing her head as if in the fervour of affec-

tion against his bosom. All her alarms were immediately dissipated; and, thrown completely off her guard, she returned the embrace, abandoning herself entirely to him. At that instant his right hand was withdrawn; and, as he uttered some words of endearment, he possessed himself of the carving knife, unperceived by her.—"Let us now retire to rest Leonard," she murmured, as her face lay buried on his chest: "It is growing late—Oh! heavens—"

And farther utterance was suddenly stopped; for, like a flash of lightning, the sharp blade, gleaming in the rays of the lamp, was drawn across her throat—the murderer turning her head and throwing it back at the same moment in order to aid his fell design. Death was almost instantaneous; and the miscreant gently lowered the body upon the floor. For nearly half a minute did he stand gazing upon that corpse—unable to believe that it was really what it seemed to be, and that he had perpetrated the deed. Then, as the awful conviction stared him fully in the face, and the entire sense of his enormity seized upon his soul, he would have given worlds, had he possessed them, to undo what was there done! But it was too late—oh! too late; and he must save himself—he must escape! A bumper of brandy gave him the courage of a brute: and, taking the lamp in his hand, he crept cautiously to Mr. Gamble's bed-room. The door was unlocked, and the old man slept profoundly. Beneath the bed was the plate-chest: but it was securely fastened with a padlock. Leonard raised the chest, and, placing it on his shoulder, was about to quit the room, when he espied upon a chair the clothes which Mr. Gamble had put off when retiring to rest. These garments the murderer likewise self-appropriated, as well as a hat, which was standing on a chest of drawers; and he noiselessly retraced his way to the chamber where the corpse lay. Turning his back towards that appalling spectacle, he proceeded to dress himself in Mr. Gamble's apparel, which fitted him quite well enough for his purpose, and was at all events a safer attire than his uniform. He next proceeded to break open the plate-chest—a task speedily effected by means of the same knife that had accomplished the murder. The contents of the chest, when rapidly scanned by his eager eyes, were evidently of great value; and he hastened to pack them up in towels, and lastly in brown paper. He then rifled the jewel-box of his murdered paramour; and, in addition to the costly articles which he found there, were the seventy pounds that the unfortunate woman had alluded to but a few minutes before she had ceased to exist. Leonard was satisfied with the booty thus acquired; and he was moreover in haste to depart. Having secured the money and jewels about his person, he took the parcel containing the plate under his arm, and stole cautiously down the stairs. All was silent throughout the house: several times did he pause to listen—but not a sound was heard;—and he gained the street without interruption. When, however, he was in the open air, he knew not whither to go—what plan to adopt,—whether to seek concealment in London until the coming storm should have blown over, or to make every effort to get out of England. The latter plan appeared to be the more advisable; and he accordingly pushed on towards the Dover road.

It was shortly after sun-rise that Mr. Gamble, awaking from a sound sleep, beheld a deep stain on

the ceiling of his chamber; and, with eyes rivetted upon it, he lay reflecting what it could possibly be. The old man was half childish; and the strangest conjectures passed through his mind. At length he grew frightened: an unknown terror stole gradually upon him—and he rang his bell violently. In a few minutes the two female domestics entered the room, having hastily huddled on some clothing; and they found their master gazing intently up at the ceiling, with a wild vacancy in the eyes. Their own looks instantly took the same direction; and one of them suddenly exclaimed, with shuddering horror, "It is blood!" They then hurried up-stairs; and a frightful spectacle met their view. Their mistress lay upon the floor, with her throat cut from ear to ear; and the carpet was completely saturated with her blood. Screams and shrieks burst from the lips of the horror-stricken woman; and rushing down stairs, they rashly communicated to Mr. Gamble, without any previous warning or preparation, the dreadful tragedy which had been enacted. The flickering, decaying lamp of the old man's intellect suddenly burnt up vividly for a few moments: the full powers of reason returned;—he comprehended the appalling news which were thus unguardedly made known to him; and with a horrible lamentation he sprang from his bed. With incredible speed did he ascend to his wife's chamber; and when the awful spectacle met his eyes, he threw up his arms in despair, gave vent to a piteous cry, and sank down on the blood-stained corpse. Meantime one of the servants had hastened next door to alarm Mr. Pomfret; and when that gentleman, accompanied by two or three of his own domestics, appeared on the scene of murder, assistance was immediately offered to Mr. Gamble. But all endeavours to recover him were ineffectual: the shock he had received was a death-blow—and life was extinct!

A few questions hastily put to the old man's servants elicited many facts dreadful for Mr. Pomfret to hear. He now learnt enough to convince him that his daughter had long maintained an illicit connexion with a handsome young dragoon—that her lover had been admitted the night before the one of the murder into the house—and that he must have been the author of the dreadful deed. Farther investigation corroborated this belief: the uniform was found, and a suit of Mr. Gamble's apparel had disappeared;—the plate, jewels, and money were likewise gone. The distracted father, having heard a long time previously that Leonard Mitchell had enlisted in a dragoon regiment, immediately suspected that he must be the criminal; and this idea was confirmed by the discovery of some letters in Ellen's desk. Information of the murder and robbery was accordingly given to the proper authorities; and Mr. Pomfret, crushed to the very dust by the weight of misfortune, crept back to his own cheerless dwelling—there to meditate upon the closing scene of the tragedy in which his own conduct had originally made his poor daughter the heroine. Bitterness was in the wretched man's soul—horror in his eyes—spasmodic shuddering in all his limbs; and, when he contemplated his child's horrible end and his own ruined fortunes, he felt indeed that he had nothing left worth living for. The cup of his adversity was not, however, quite full yet: but in a few hours it was overflowing—for his head clerk arrived in a cab, and, rushing into the parlour without ceremony, announced to him that the officers of justice were in search of him, a true

bill of indictment having been found against him for certain frauds in his commercial transactions. "Thank you—thank you, for coming to give me this timely warning," said Mr. Pomfret, pressing his clerk's hand with painful violence: "I will depart immediately;"—and he staggered from the room. The clerk waited five minutes, and began to grow impatient: ten minutes elapsed—and still his master did not reappear. The man rose and rang the bell furiously to summon one of the domestics; but at the same instant the constables entered the house. These officials, having learnt from the servant who admitted them, that Mr. Pomfret was at home, proceeded to search the dwelling; and the clerk, now entertaining the worst fears, accompanied them to the ruined merchant's bed-chamber. There those fears met with immediate confirmation: Mr. Pomfret had put a period to his existence—he had hanged himself to a strong nail in his sleeping apartment! The body was instantly cut down, and medical assistance promptly obtained: but the wretched suicide was no more.

In the evening of that same day a man was arrested under suspicious circumstances at Dover. The news of the awful occurrences in Stamford Street had not reached that town at the time—for there was neither railway nor electric telegraph between London and the Kentish coast in those days: but the individual alluded to, had presented a quantity of plate at a pawnbroker's shop, and, not being able to give a satisfactory account of how it came into his possession, was detained until a constable arrived to take him into custody. On the ensuing morning the tidings of the murder in London reached Dover; and the particulars given by the newspapers of the preceding evening were ample enough to identify the person under arrest with the Leonard Mitchell who was accused of desertion, murder, and robbery. He was accordingly sent under a strong escort to the metropolis, where, on his arrival, he was immediately lodged in Newgate. In due course his trial came on: he was found guilty upon evidence the most conclusive:—and, upon being called upon to allege anything wherefore sentence of death should not be passed, he addressed the Judge in the following manner:—"I acknowledge, my lord, that I am guilty of the dreadful crime imputed to me; and although it be too late—far too late to express contrition now, I nevertheless declare that I am deeply, deeply penitent. My lord, lost—degraded—criminal—and condemned, as I stand here in your presence, I was once as sincerely attached to virtue as any man or woman who now hears me. Even when adversity entered the paternal dwelling, ravaging it with the desolating fury of an army, I yielded to no evil temptation: neither did my confidence in the justice, the goodness, and the wisdom of heaven abate. I enlisted, my lord, in order to obtain an honest livelihood, and to stifle in the bustle of a new state of existence the painful reminiscences of blighted hopes and crushed affections. The officers who have appeared before your lordship this day, have all admitted, in reply to the question I put to them, that up to the time when I was sentenced to three hundred lashes, I had never even received a reprimand nor had been once reported for the slightest irregularity. But from the moment that the first blow of the torturing and degrading weapon fell upon my back, my existence assumed a new phase—my soul underwent a sudden and immediate



change. With each drop of blood that oozed from my lacerated back, ebbcd away some sentiment of rectitude—some principle of virtue. My lord, it was the lash that drove me to drinking—that made me reckless of all consequences—that made me a liar and a voluptuary, a mean fellow and a paltry rascal—and that hardened my heart so as to render it inaccessible to every feeling of honour, mercy, or remorse. It was the lash, then, that has made me a murderer; and I might almost claim to be pitied, rather than to be looked upon with loathing. A cruel law taught me to be cruel: a merciless and barbarian punishment prepared me to become a ruthless and ferocious assassin. And now, my lord, I am about to reveal a fact which has long ago been suspected, and which, situated as I unhappily am, need not exist in doubt or uncertainty any more. My life must be forfeited for the crime which has been proved against me this day; and it will unburthen my soul of a heavy secret to confess another crime, which I perpetrated upwards of a year ago. Your lordship doubtless remembers that a young nobleman—an officer in the regiment to which I belonged—was shot at a review in Hyde Park. My lord, I

was the assassin: the man accused me wrongfully—persecuted me unrelentingly—and lied most foully against me,—and I was avenged."

As Leonard uttered these last words in a firm tone and with marked emphasis, a thrill of horror passed through the crowded court; and the dead silence which had been observed while he was speaking, was succeeded by a subdued murmuring as of many voices commenting on what he had said. Erect, and with an evident determination to meet his doom courageously, the unhappy young man stood in the dock—his eye quailing not, his limbs trembling not; and, heinous as his offences were, he was not altogether without commiseration on the part of many present. The judge put on the black cap; and the sentence of death—that barbarian sentence—was pronounced in due form, the culprit receiving an intimation that he need entertain no hope of mercy. The hint was unnecessary: he had made up his mind to suffer;—and as firmly as he walked out of the dock back into the prison, so resolutely did he step from that same prison ten days afterwards on to the scaffold erected at the debtors' door. A tremendous crowd was assembled

to witness the execution; and the unhappy criminal maintained his courage to the last.

From that time have the three houses in Stamford Street been shut up: from that period have they been suffered to fall into decay. In the first, old Mr. Mitchell expired suddenly: in the second, Mr. Pomfret hung himself;—and in the third, Ellen was brutally murdered. The hand of Fate had marked those three tenements to be the scenes of horror and of crime; and a superstitious feeling on the part of certain credulous and weak-minded neighbours soon engendered the report that they were haunted. It was said that the ghost of the young lady had been seen walking in her shroud, in the yard behind the house where she was murdered: and rumour added that on the anniversary night of the dread crime which had hurried her to a premature grave, she was wont to wander about the premises, uttering hollow and sepulchral moans. Such reports as these lose nothing by repetition during the lapse of years, especially while the buildings which were the scenes of the crimes engendering the superstition, continue to exist; and therefore is it that even at the present day the evil reputation of the HAUNTED HOUSES remains unimpaired in Stamford Street and its neighbourhood.

CHAPTER CLXXIX.

THE GHOST.—AGNES AND MRS. MORTIMER.

THE preceding episode has run to a considerable length; but we hope and believe that our readers will experience no difficulty in resuming the thread of the general narrative.

It must be remembered that the leading incidents of the story just placed on record were related to Mrs. Mortimer by Jack Rily, by way of passing the few hours during which they had agreed to remain with Vitriol Bob, who, bound hand and foot, was seated helplessly in a chair.

"Yes," observed Jack Rily, when he had brought his history to a conclusion, "they do say that the young woman walks at times—"

"Don't speak in such a solemn tone," interrupted Mrs. Mortimer, casting a shuddering glance around: "you almost make me think that you yourself believe in the possibility of the spectral visitation."

"Well—I don't know how it is," returned the Doctor, feeling a certain superstitious influence growing upon him, and which he vainly endeavoured to shake off;—"but I certainly never before had such sensations as I experience now. Upon my soul," he cried, striking the table violently with his clenched fist, "I am a prey to vague and undefined alarms to night:—but I will subdue them!"

"And are you sure that this is the house where the young lady was murdered?" asked Mrs. Mortimer, after a brief pause.

"There is no doubt about that," responded Jack Rily. "Vitriol Bob there can tell you that the floor of the chamber where the deed took place is blackened with accumulated dust, yet in the middle there is a deeper stain; and on the ceiling of the room beneath, it is easy to descry the same sinister traces, even amidst dirt and cobwebs."

"Then, as you said just now," remarked Mrs. Mortimer, drawing her shawl over her shoulders—

for she experienced the chill of superstitious terror gaining upon her,—"as you said just now, *this* is the second murder that has been committed within these walls!"

Scarcely had Mrs. Mortimer ceased speaking when the bell of the neighbouring church proclaimed the hour of *one*.

"Now is the time for the ghost," said Vitriol Bob, with a low but ferocious chuckle; for he experienced a malignant pleasure in observing that superstitious fears were gaining on the formidable Rily and the hideous old woman. "You don't like the near neighbourhood of the stiff 'un, I'm a-thinking! Well—I'll lay you a wager, Jack, that I'll go and shake the old feller by the hand quite in a friendly way—if you will but take off these cursed cords. There's no ill feelin' betwixt us now."

"I would much rather leave you where you are, and send Polly Calvert to release you," replied the Doctor.

"Yes—yes," hastily exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer "let him be where he is. But surely we may go now, Mr. Rily? It is getting on for two—"

"It has only just this minit struck one!" cried Vitriol Bob, with a malignant leer from his dark, reptile-like eyes, which seemed to shine with a glare of their own, independent of and brighter than the dim light of the miserable candle. "Besides," he added, now purposely rendering his voice as solemn and ominous in its tone as possible, "'tis just the time for the ghost of the young gal—or rayther, the young o'man to walk; and I should be wexed indeed if you didn't stay to have a look at her. I've seen her more than once—"

"That's an infernal falsehood, Bob!" exclaimed Jack Rily, starting from his seat on the barrel, and vainly endeavouring to subdue the nervous excitement that had gained so rapidly upon him.

"It's true—true as you're there!" cried the murderer, who felt a ferocious joy at thus inspiring terror in the mind of the strong and hardened ruffian who had conquered him. "And I'll tell you somethink more too," continued Vitriol Bob: "you said just now—and you said truly also—that on the anniversary of the murder the young lady wanders about the place, uttering holler moans. Well—this is the night, then, that she was murdered just twenty years ago;—and the clock has struck *one*."

The effect which these words produced upon Jack Rily and Mrs. Mortimer was as rapid as it was extraordinary. Although they were both of a nature peculiarly inaccessible to superstitious terrors on common occasions, and under any other circumstances would have laughed at the idea of spectral visitations and ghostly wanderings,—yet now they vainly struggled against the powerful influence of increasing terror; and, although in their hearts, they more than half suspected that Vitriol Bob had spoken only to aggravate their alarms, yet they could not shake off the awe and consternation that seized upon their souls. In respect to Jack Rily, it was one of those periods of evanescent weakness which the most brutal and remorseless ruffians are known periodically to experience;—but, with regard to Mrs. Mortimer, it was the singularity of her present position—the consciousness that she was in a lonely place with two men of desperate character—the terrible remembrance that the murdered corpse of her husband lay in the adjoining room—the impression made upon her mind by the appalling his-

tory or crime which had been so elaborately detailed to her—the thought that the very floors and the ceilings of the uppermost chambers in that house, bore testimony to the tale of blood—and the idea that the ghost of the assassinated lady was wont to wander in the depth of the night and on the scene of the crime,—it was all this that struck Mrs. Mortimer with awe and consternation, rendering her incapable of serious reflection, and levelling her strong mind as it were beneath the influence of superstitious terrors.

"Well—what the devil is the matter with you both?" demanded Vitriol Bob, after a pause.

"How do you mean?" asked Jack Rily, rescating himself, and grasping the brandy-bottle with a trembling hand.

"Why—you and the old lady looked at each other as if you already heard the light step and the rustling shroud of the apparition," said the murderer.

"Hark! what was that?" ejaculated the Doctor, once more starting to his feet.

"It certainly was a noise somewhere," observed Mrs. Mortimer, trembling from head to foot.

"Perhaps the old man in the back-kitchen has got up and is groping his way about," said Vitriol Bob, speaking with an affectation of terror which was so natural that it cruelly enhanced the superstitious alarms experienced by his companions.

"This is intolerable!" exclaimed Rily, looking in a ghastly manner towards the door, as if he more than half expected to behold it suddenly thrown open, and some hideous form appear on the threshold. "I can't make out what it is that has come over me to-night! 'Tis like a warning—and yet I never believed in ghosts until now."

"Nor I—nor I!" murmured Mrs. Mortimer.

"But to-night—I feel also as if——"

"Hark!" suddenly cried Vitriol Bob: "there is a noise again!"

"It must be the old man!" ejaculated the Doctor. "Are you sure that you did for him thoroughly?"

"If anything like him meets your eyes, Jack, it must be his ghost, I can assure you," was the solemn answer—although Vitriol Bob himself partook not in the slightest degree of the superstitious terrors that had grown upon his companions, but was on the contrary inwardly chuckling with malignant joy at their awe-struck state of mind.

"There! did you hear it?" demanded Mrs. Mortimer, in a hasty and excited tone. "I am sure it was a noise this time: there could be no mistake about it!"

And she endeavoured to rise from her chair;—but terror kept her motionless—paralysing every limb, though not placing a seal upon her lips.

"Something dreadful is to happen to-night—I know it—I feel it!" said Jack Rily, in a tone which indicated remorse for a long career of crime and turpitude. "By God! 'tis the back-door of the house that is opening——"

"Then this is serious indeed!" interrupted Vitriol Bob, now alarmed in his turn—but rather on account of constables than spectres. "Unloose me—let us fight—resist——"

"Silence!" muttered Jack Rily, in a low but imperious tone.

There was a pause of nearly a minute, during which the three inmates of the kitchen held their breath to listen, in painful suspense.

Suddenly the rattling of the crazy bannisters outside fell upon their ears; and Jack Rily, worked

up to a pitch of desperation, seized the candle, saying in a hoarse and dogged tone, "By hell! I will face it, whatever it may be!"

With these words he tore open the kitchen-door;—and, behold! before him stood a female form—clothed in white—with a countenance pale as death—her hair flowing wildly and dishevelled over her shoulders—and with eyes fixed in unnatural brilliancy upon him.

The ruffian was for a few moments paralyzed—stupified with horror: then, unable any longer to endure the spectacle which his fears converted into a corpse wrapped in a winding-sheet, he exclaimed, "The ghost! the ghost!"—and dropped the candle upon the floor.

Total darkness immediately ensued.

At the same instant a piercing scream echoed through the house; and Mrs. Mortimer, now recovering all her presence of mind, started to her feet, crying, "That is no apparition—save of flesh and blood! Haste, Jack Rily—procure a light! Where are you, man? Let us see who it is?"

"Here I am," returned the Doctor, likewise regaining his self-possession. "Bob, where are the lucifers?"

"In my right-hand pocket," growled the murderer, who, in the excitement of the past scene, and in the tremendous but ineffectual exertions which he had made to release himself from his bonds the moment the light was extinguished, had fallen from his seat and rolled upon the floor.

Nearly half a minute now elapsed ere the candle was found and lighted again; and then Jack Rily, closely followed by Mrs. Mortimer, hastened into the passage, where they beheld the form of a young female stretched senseless at the foot of the stairs.

The old woman stooped down to raise her: but scarcely had she caught a glimpse of the pale countenance, on which the finger of death seemed to have been placed, when, starting with surprise and joy, she exclaimed, "'Tis Agnes Vernon, as I am a living being!"

"Agnes Vernon—who is she? do you know her?" demanded the Doctor, holding forward the light. "By Jove! she is a sweet creature, whoever she is! That's right—raise her gently. But is she dead, poor thing?"

"No—no: her heart beats—and her lips already begin to move," responded Mrs. Mortimer hastily, as she held the still senseless maiden in her arms. "Well—this is a lucky chance that has thrown her in our way—and there's money to be made out of it."

"So much the better? Shall I get a little water?" asked the Doctor.

"Yes—and use despatch," returned Mrs. Mortimer. Jack Rily entered the kitchen, and filled a glass with water.

"Who is it?" demanded Vitriol Bob, whom the Doctor had previously restored to his position in the chair.

"A young lady that Mrs. Mortimer happens to know," was the reply. "There is no danger from other visitors, according to all appearances: so keep quiet, and don't alarm yourself."

The Doctor hastened back into the passage, where Mrs. Mortimer was seated on the last step of the staircase, supporting Agnes in her arms.

"Now, will you follow my advice, Mr. Rily?" she demanded in a rapid tone, as she sprinkled the

water upon the pallid countenance of the young lady.

"Yes—if it seems feasible," was the immediate answer. "What is it?"

"That we do not keep this timid thing a moment longer in the house than is absolutely necessary," continued Mrs. Mortimer. "For our own sakes we must guard against her beholding the interior of that place;" and, as she uttered these words in a low tone, she nodded significantly towards the door of the back kitchen where the corpse of Torrens had been deposited.

"Yes—yes: I understand," said Jack Rily: "it might be thought that we were accomplices in the murder. In the same way it would do no good to let her see Vitriol Bob bound neck and crop in the front kitchen."

"That is just what I was about to suggest," observed Mrs. Mortimer. "We must get her out of the house as soon as possible, and into a cab——"

"Then don't use any more means to recover her," interrupted Jack Rily, snatching the glass of water from the old woman's hand. "Let her remain for a short time longer in that trance: it will not kill her, depend upon it—and you have the advantage of possessing an *Æsculapius* in me."

"What do you propose, then?" demanded Mrs. Mortimer, casting an anxious glance upon the countenance of the still senseless girl.

"Don't be frightened, I tell you," repeated Jack Rily: "I will guarantee that she shall recover. But let us be off at once. I will take her in my arms and carry her into Bennett Street; the neighbourhood is all quiet and deserted at this hour;—and you shall order round a cab from the stand in the road. There are always two or three in attendance throughout the night."

"Good!" exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer. "We will be off at once."

"This instant," said Jack Rily, as he gently raised the motionless, senseless form in his powerful arms, while Mrs. Mortimer took off her shawl and wrapped it hastily over the head and shoulders of Agnes.

The Doctor gave a hurried intimation to Vitriol Bob that Molly Calvert should be sent to him as speedily as possible; and he then stole out of the house, Mrs. Mortimer having previously ascertained that the coast was perfectly clear.

Everything was effected as Jack Rily had proposed. He gained Bennett Street, with his lovely burthen in his arms; and there he waited in the deep darkness afforded by a large gateway, until Mrs. Mortimer came round with the cab. The maiden was placed in the vehicle, which the old woman entered in order to take charge of her; and Jack Rily, after having made an appointment with his accomplice for the next evening, bade her a temporary farewell.

The cab drove away towards Park Square; and the Doctor, on his side, hurried off to the lodgings of Pig-faced Moll.

But the thread of our narrative now lies with Mrs. Mortimer and the beautiful Agnes Vernon.

Scarcely had the cab moved away from the vicinity of the haunted houses, when Agnes began rapidly to recover; and, on opening her eyes, she became aware that she was reclining in the arms of a female, and that they were being borne speedily along in a vehicle. For an instant it struck her that she must be with her mother: but in the next moment the horrors of the night crowded rapidly

into her memory,—and, starting up, she demanded in a hurried, anxious manner, "Where am I? and who are you?"

Scarcely were the questions put when the young maiden was enabled, by the silver moon-light, to catch a glimpse of the countenance of her companion; and she instantly recognised Mrs. Mortimer.

Her first emotions were of joy and gratitude;—for she was delighted to find herself in the care of a female—especially one of whom she knew something: and, taking the old woman's hand, she said, "Madam, I know not how to thank you—and am scarcely aware of what I have to thank you for. But—if my impressions be correct—you must have rescued me from something very terrible! Yes—I recollect now—that door opening—a light appearing—and then that hideous, horrible face——"

And, with a visible shudder, the maiden threw herself back in the vehicle, pressing her hands to her throbbing brows in order to collect her still disjointed and somewhat confused reminiscences.

"You are labouring under dreadful recollections my dear child," said Mrs. Mortimer, in a soothing tone. "Know you not—can you not suspect that you were in the power of a ruffian when I fortunately encountered you?"

"But where—where?" demanded Agnes, impatiently, as her settling ideas seemed to coincide with that belief.

"I should rather ask you, my sweet maiden," said Mrs. Mortimer, "how you came to be in Stamford Street this night."

"My mother took me thither—yes—I recollect it all now!" exclaimed Agnes. "She left me at the house of some dear friends—and I was ungrateful enough to entertain the most injurious suspicions respecting them,—yes—and relative to my own dear mother also."

"Your mother!" repeated Mrs. Mortimer, in astonishment. "I thought you had never known her—or that she had died when you were in your infancy."

"Oh! no—thank God! my mother is alive—and I know her now!" ejaculated Agnes, with all the enthusiasm of a strongly reviving affection—a powerfully resuscitating devotion for that parent whom she had so lately discovered.

"But where is your mother now?" enquired Mrs. Mortimer.

"Ah! that I know not!" replied Agnes. "And this reminds me," she exclaimed after a few moments' pause, "that you must take me back to the good kind ladies in Stamford Street, that I may remain there until my mother shall come to fetch me away to the new home which she has promised to prepare for me."

"Who are those good ladies?" asked Mrs. Mortimer.

"Their name is Theobald, and they live in Stamford Street," responded the artless girl. "You may know the house—or at least the driver of, the vehicle can find it out, when I describe it as being situated fourth from the corner of the Blackfriars' Road, and next to three deserted—dilapidated—sinister-looking houses——"

"Ah! then you must have found your way from the dwelling of your friends into one of those ruined places," thought Mrs. Mortimer. "But I am really at a loss, my dear young lady, to comprehend all you tell me," she said aloud.

"Before I give you the necessary explanations to enable you to understand it all," said Agnes, "will you inform me which road the vehicle is pursuing?"

"I am taking you to a place of safety, my dear girl," responded Mrs. Mortimer.

"A place of safety!" repeated Agnes, her countenance assuming an expression of deep anxiety: "am I, then, in any danger? and in what does the peril consist?"

"I know not, my love," answered the old woman, speaking in the kindest tone of voice. "I only judge by the condition in which I found you—the circumstances which threw us this night together—and the observations which have fallen from your lips, that you were indeed in a state of extreme danger."

"Just heaven!" ejaculated Agnes. "But what observations did I make——"

"That you had entertained suspicions relative to the friends to whose care your mother had consigned you," said Mrs. Mortimer.

"Yes—and I told you truly," resumed the ingenuous maiden. "I know not how it was—I cannot account for it now—but when I found myself alone in a strange house, terrible though undefined fears took possession of my soul—and I resolved to escape. I succeeded in getting as far as the next house, which I entered: but scarcely had I crossed the threshold of the back door, when a light suddenly appeared and a countenance was revealed to my affrighted gaze—a countenance so dreadful to look upon that I tremble now as I think of it. Then, so far as I can recollect, I heard a voice thundering something loud but unintelligible in my ears: I screamed—and fainted. When I came to my senses, I was in your arms and in this vehicle."

"I can throw some light upon the matter," said Mrs. Mortimer, whose object was to keep the attention of Agnes as much and as unremittingly engaged as possible, so as to prevent her from growing uneasy relative to the ultimate destination of the cab: for should she become alarmed, she might appeal to the driver for protection, and a disturbance in the streets would prove inevitable. "You must know," continued Mrs. Mortimer, "that I was returning home from a friend's house in Stamford-street, when I met a great, stout, horribly ugly man carrying a female form in his arms. The moon-light showed me his dreadful countenance—and I instantly suspected that some foul play was intended. I accordingly insisted that he should stop—which he did with much reluctance, declaring that you were his daughter, and that he was taking you home, as you had fallen down in a fit."

"Oh! then some mischief was really meditated towards me!" exclaimed Agnes, clasping her hands together in shuddering horror of the perils through which she supposed herself to have passed.

"Yes—my dear child," observed Mrs. Mortimer, "you doubtless owe your life to me——"

"Ah! madam," interrupted Agnes, "how can I ever sufficiently thank you for your goodness?"—then, as a reminiscence struck to her artless mind with the pang of a remorse, she exclaimed, as she pressed the old woman's wrinkled hands to her lips, "It seems fated that I should suspect those who are my best friends!"

"Do not think of that, my love," said the wily old creature, who easily conjectured what was passing in that amiable maiden's ingenuous soul.

"When you know me better, you will appreciate my conduct towards you as it deserves. Doubtless your father set you against me—and then that little misunderstanding relative to the affair of Lord William Trevelyan—But enough of that for the present! Let me conclude my little narrative relative to yourself. Well, I was describing to you how I compelled the man to stop; and I was about to tell you that I was by no means satisfied with the explanations he gave me. Indeed, I threatened to summon the assistance of the police; and you may be well assured that this menace suddenly became a settled resolution, when, as the moonlight fell upon the countenance of the fair creature whom the man carried in his arms, I recognised yourself, my sweet Agnes! You can conceive my astonishment, perhaps—but you can form no idea of the apprehension that seized on me; for I really love you dearly, although I have seen so little of you. The man was dreadfully alarmed when he perceived that I knew you; and I had no difficulty in compelling him to surrender you into my charge. He then decamped; and I placed you in a cab which happened to be passing at the time. You now know all."

"Ah! from what inconceivable perils have you not saved me!" exclaimed Agnes, full of enthusiastic and impassioned gratitude towards the woman whom she looked upon as her deliverer. "My dear mother will thank you warmly—earnestly—most sincerely for this generous act on your part; and I shall never, never forget the deep obligation under which you have placed me."

"Enough on that subject, my dear child," said Mrs. Mortimer. "You have spoken several times of your mother—may I ask how you came to discover her, or how she happened to have remained so long unknown to you?"

"I am bewildered when I think of all that!" returned Miss Vernon, in a mournful tone. "It was last evening that she came to me—that she sought me out in my retirement—that she announced herself as my parent; and my heart's feelings gave me the assurance that she was indeed what she represented herself to be. Then I agreed to accompany her—for she told me that she was unhappy, and she claimed my love and my duty as a daughter. Oh! my dear madam, you can doubtless understand how joyous—how delightful were my emotions on thus encountering a mother whom I had never known till then! I only thought of giving way to those delicious feelings—until I found myself left in the charge of strangers. Then it was that I grew afraid—that vague and undefinable apprehensions took possession of my soul—that I became suspicious of all and everything—and that I fled! Foolish, mistaken creature that I was! That one false step of mine threw me into the hands of a monster, who would perhaps have killed me had you not rescued me from his power."

Agnes paused, and arranged her hair—her dark, luxuriant, glossy hair—floating so wildly and yet so beautifully in its dishevelled state, over her shoulders;—and now, as the tint of the rose had returned to her cheeks, and her eyes had recovered their witching softness of expression, she appeared transcendantly lovely to the view of the old woman, whom the moon-light enabled to survey the charming creature seated opposite to her.

Suddenly the vehicle stopped;—and Agnes, hastily looking from the windows, beheld a row of hand-

some houses on one side, and an enclosure of verdant shrubs and plants on the other.

"This is not Stamford Street, madam," she said to Mrs. Mortimer.

"No, my dear child," was the almost whispered reply: "but it is a place of safety to which I have brought you. Do you imagine that I, who have saved your life this night, could intend you any harm? Wherefore be thus over suspicious respecting your best friends?"

These words not only reassured Agnes, but made her blush at what she deemed to be her ingratitude towards her deliverer;—and, pressing the old woman's hand fervently, she murmured, "Forgive me, I implore you!"

"Think no more of it, my love," said Mrs. Mortimer, as she alighted from the vehicle: then, turning towards the maiden, she added, "Remain in your place for a few minutes until I have aroused the people of the house: the chill air of the early morning will give you cold, lightly clad as you are."

Agnes signified an assent; and the old woman hastened up to the front door of the house at which they had stopped. She knocked and rang: but some time elapsed ere the summons was answered. At length a domestic, who had huddled on some clothing, made his appearance; and, to Mrs. Mortimer's query whether his master were at home, an affirmative reply was given.

"Then hesitate not to arouse him—for I have called upon a matter of great importance to his lordship," said the old woman.

"Certainly I will do so, madam," returned the domestic; "since you assure me that your business is pressing. But will you not walk in and await his lordship's readiness to receive you?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Mortimer; "and I have a person with me who must accompany me. But listen to something that I have to urge upon you. You will conduct us both, as a matter of course, into the same room: but when your master is ready to receive me, take care that I obtain an interview alone with him in the first instance. It is of the highest consequence that these instructions should be fully attended to."

"You shall be obeyed, madam," said the servant.

Mrs. Mortimer now fetched Agnes from the vehicle, which she ordered to be kept waiting for herself; and the two females were conducted by the domestic into a handsome apartment, where, having lighted the wax-candles, he left them.

CHAPTER CLXXX.

AGNES AND TREVELYAN.

IN spite of her anxiety to place confidence in Mrs. Mortimer—in spite of the deep obligation under which she believed herself to be lying towards her, Agnes could not subdue a partial feeling of uneasiness when she found that she was in a strange house, evidently the abode of a rich person.

She gazed round the walls covered with splendid pictures—on the chandelier suspended to the ceiling—on the elegant and costly furniture—the superb mantel-ornaments—and down upon the luxurious carpet, so thick that her tiny feet were almost imbedded in it, as if she were walking in snow.

Whose dwelling could it be? Assuredly not Mrs. Mortimer's—for she was only treated as a visitress. At length, after the lapse of a few minutes, the young maiden ventured to ask, "Who are the friends, madam, with whom you propose to leave me?"

"Does not that very question, Agnes, imply a suspicion injurious to me?" said Mrs. Mortimer, evasively.

"Oh! no—no!" exclaimed Miss Vernon, in a melting tone of the profoundest sincerity. "But may I not ask so simple a question without being liable to such a distressing imputation?"

"Can you not leave yourself in the hands of one who has saved your life and who wishes you well?" said the old woman, speaking in a voice of mingled reproach and conciliation.

"Yes—certainly, madam," was the immediate answer: "but you yourself are not going to remain here—inasmuch as you have ordered the cabriolet to wait for you."

"True, Agnes: because I have business of importance to transact at an early hour this morning and at a considerable distance hence. Reassure yourself, my darling girl," continued the iniquitous hag: "you will be delighted to meet the person whom you will presently see. Indeed, it is only a little surprise which I am preparing for you—and, after all I have done for you, you surely will not deny me the pleasure which I promise myself in beholding the interview between yourself and the owner of this splendid mansion."

By degrees, as Mrs. Mortimer spoke, the countenance of Agnes brightened up; for it struck the young maiden that it was her mother whom she was now to meet—and this idea grew into a positive conviction by the time the old woman had uttered the last words of her sentence. She was accordingly about to express renewed gratitude for the happy surprise thus reserved for her, when the door opened and the domestic returned to the apartment.

"Madam, will you follow me?" he said, addressing himself to Mrs. Mortimer.

"My dear child," observed the old woman, turning towards Agnes and patting her face with a show of affection, "you will remain here for a few minutes—a very few minutes; and then," she added, with a sly smile, which meant as much as to intimate that she read the hope entertained by Agnes, and should speedily have the pleasure of gratifying it,—“and then, my love, you will not scold me for having kept you a little in suspense.”

Tears of gratitude trembled upon the long dark lashes of the beautiful maiden, although her lips were wreathed in smiles:—but when Nature melts into April softness, 'tis with mingled rain and sunshine.

While Agnes remained alone in the handsome parlour, cradling herself in the hope that the lapse of a few minutes would see her embraced in the arms of her mother, Mrs. Mortimer was conducted into another apartment, where she found herself in the presence of Lord William Trevelyan, who had dressed himself with as much despatch as possible.

"Well, madam," he said, in a hasty and even anxious tone, "what has brought you hither at this unseasonable hour?—whom have you with you?—and wherefore this desire, as expressed to my domestic, to see me alone in the first instance?"

"My lord, it is Agnes Vernon who has accom-

panted me, and who is in the room which I have just left," answered the old woman.

"I thought so—I was afraid that it was so, when the servant gave me a description of her—a very rapid and partial one, it is true, inasmuch as he beheld her only for a few moments. But, great heavens! madam," continued the young nobleman, speaking with singular and unusual vivacity, "what means this strange proceeding?"

"That Agnes required an asylum, and I brought her hither," was the response.

"And do you for an instant imagine, madam, that I am capable—that I would be guilty—that I— But, enough! I will say no more to you: I see through your real character—and I loathe and despise it! My God! to think that I should have enlisted a common procuress in my service! Oh! how can I ever look Agnes in the face?—how venture to accost her, after having thus offered her the most flagrant of insults? But, tell me, vile woman," he exclaimed, seizing Mrs. Mortimer forcibly by the wrist, while his tone and manner alike indicated the most painful excitement,—“tell me, I say, by what detestable artifices you have induced that innocent and unsuspecting maiden to accompany you hither?"

"My lord, you will be ashamed of yourself for this unworthy conduct towards me, when you come to know all,—yes, ashamed and astonished at the same time," said Mrs. Mortimer, assuming an air of offended dignity and wounded pride.

"How?—speak!" ejaculated Lord William, dropping the woman's arm and surveying her with mingled surprise and repentance.

"I shall not waste precious time in entering into details," resumed Mrs. Mortimer. "Yesterday morning I saw Agnes and induced her to peruse your letter. She was offended, and tossed it indignantly back to me."

"Ah!" cried the nobleman, his countenance assuming an expression of extreme vexation.

"Yes—and here it is," continued Mrs. Mortimer, producing the epistle from her reticule, and laying it upon the table.

"But she read it, you say?" exclaimed Lord William.

"Every word," was the response. "Nevertheless, though softened and even pleased at first, she subsequently thought better of it, and rejected the communication in the manner I have described. I was disheartened, and felt unwilling to return to you with such unwelcome intelligence. An hour ago I quitted the house of a friend in Stamford Street; and in that same street the following adventure occurred to me."

The old woman then related precisely the same anecdote which she had already told to Agnes, relative to the pretended rescue of that young lady from the power of a man who was bearing her along insensible in his arms.

The young nobleman was astounded; and his manner denoted incredulity.

"I perceive that your lordship puts no faith in my narrative," said Mrs. Mortimer, who conjectured what was passing in his mind: "but the tale which Agnes can tell you, will corroborate it. She herself will inform you how she fell into the power of the ruffian from whom it was subsequently my good fortune to deliver her; and if you place confidence in her words, you will perforce be led to accord the same favour to mine?"

"And her tale—what is it?" demanded the nobleman, impatiently.

"Yesterday she discovered the mother whom she had lost since her infancy," answered Mrs. Mortimer.

"Her mother!" exclaimed Trevelyan. "And where is that mother? who is she? Tell me, that I may hasten to her at as early an hour as possible and implore of her to accord me the hand of her daughter."

"Be not so hasty, my lord. I am totally unacquainted with Agnes Vernon's mother; and she herself—poor artless girl! knows, I believe, but little more. It is however certain that the young lady was induced to accompany her newly-found parent from the cottage—that she was consigned to the care of two ladies named Theobald, and dwelling in Stamford Street—that in the night she became the prey to vague and unfounded terrors, which induced her to attempt an escape from the house—and that she fell into the hands of the man from whom I rescued her."

"And wherefore have you brought her hither?" asked Lord William. "Why not have conducted her back to the ladies to whose care her mother had consigned her—or to the cottage where she has dwelt so long?"

"I have put you in the position of one who may perform a chivalrous action, and thereby win the permanent esteem, gratitude, and love of this beautiful creature whom you adore," said Mrs. Mortimer; "and now you appear inclined to load me with reproaches. Yes—I perceive that reproaches are trembling upon your lordship's tongue;—and I who have done all I could to serve you, shall experience nought save ingratitude. Oh! short-sighted lover that you are! Here is a young girl whom I pick up as it were houseless and homeless—and I am already half-way with her to your mansion, before I even learn from her lips how she came in Stamford Street at all, or that she has friends there. But when I do glean those facts, I find that she has escaped from the guardianship of those friends; and could I suppose that they would be willing to receive her again? Now, my lord, it is for you to grant her an asylum—to treat her with all imaginable delicacy and attention—and to leave me to find out her mother, that you may restore the lost daughter to the distracted parent. Doubtless the Miss Theobalds will give me the desired information: and then calculate the amount of gratitude that will be due to you! In spite of her father—whoever he may really be, and whatever opposition he might raise—Agnes is yours; and you gain the object of your heart's dearest wishes."

"And think you, woman," exclaimed Lord William Trevelyan, unable any longer to subdue his resentment,—“think you that I will blast the fair fame of this young lady by retaining her for even a single hour beneath my roof?—think you that I will obtain for her the inevitable reputation of having been my mistress, previously to becoming my wife? No—a thousand times no! And do you imagine that I read not your heart aright? do you suppose that I am your dupe? I tell you, vile woman, that in bringing the innocent and artless Agnes hither, you fancied you would be throwing in my way a temptation which I could not resist,—a temptation which would thaw all my virtuous principles and honourable notions, and lead me to sacrifice the purity of the confiding girl to my passion."

Yes—such was your base calculation: or you would at once and unhesitatingly have conducted her either to the abode of her friends in Stamford Street, or home to her own cottage! Ah! madam, because I belong to the aristocracy, you imagine that I must necessarily be as vile, depraved, and unprincipled as ninety-nine out of every hundred individuals who bear lordly titles. But you have deceived yourself—grossly deceived yourself: and you shall at once have the proof that you are so deceived! Follow me.”

Thus speaking, Lord William advanced rapidly towards the door, imperiously beckoning the vile woman to accompany him.

“Whither are you going, my lord?” she demanded, finding that she had indeed over-reached herself—that the nobleman’s principles were more profoundly rooted than she had imagined—and that all her trouble was likely to go unrewarded.

“Follow me, I say: as you have done this amount of mischief, you shall at least see it remedied to the utmost of my power;”—and the nobleman burst from the room, literally dragging the old woman with him.

In less than a minute they entered the apartment where Agnes was anxiously—oh! most anxiously awaiting the presence of her mother;—and the moment the door was opened, she darted forward to precipitate herself into the arms of her parent.

But, recognising Lord William Trevelyan, she stopped short with a cry of mingled disappointment, surprise, and alarm; while an ashy pallor overspread her countenance.

“Reassure yourself, Miss Vernon—I am your friend, and a man of honour!” were the encouraging words which Trevelyan hastened to address to her.

“And my mother?” said the young maiden, bending a look of earnest appeal upon Mrs. Mortimer, who however shrunk back in confusion.

“Your mother is not here, Miss Vernon,” exclaimed the nobleman: “neither does this woman know where to find her. An act of the greatest imprudence has been committed in bringing you hither—”

“Oh! what do I hear!” cried Agnes, clasping her hands. “Is this your house, my lord? If so,” she added, with dignity succeeding grief, “I am innocent of any intention to intrude: indeed, your lordship might full well conceive that I should not have come hither of my own accord—oh! no—not for worlds!”

And tears rolled down the cheeks of the gentle girl: for she felt humiliated in the presence of the very man in whose eyes, if her young heart had a preference, she would have fain appeared in another light.

“Oh! Miss Vernon, it is you who do not understand me!” ejaculated Lord William, advancing and taking her hand. “If I spoke of the imprudence which had been committed, it was on your account only! For believe me when I declare that I should be proud,—yes, and in the enjoyment of an elysian happiness, could you enter this mansion to remain here—to command here, with honour to yourself! But I will not avail myself of this opportunity to urge a suit that I have already ventured to prefer, and in the prosecution of which I unfortunately selected so improper an agent.”

As he uttered these words, he bent an indignant look upon Mrs. Mortimer, who turned away petulantly and made for the door.

“Stop, woman!” cried the young nobleman, hastening to detain her: “I cannot yet part with you, intolerable as your presence has become to me.

“Miss Vernon,” he continued, again turning toward the maiden, whose sense of humiliation had vanished, and who in her heart of hearts now rejoiced in the conviction that Lord William Trevelyan was indeed as noble in nature as he was in name,—“I need scarcely observe that circumstances compel me to procure for you an asylum for the remainder of the night as speedily as possible. You will permit me to conduct you to the abode of a lady of my acquaintance,—a lady who will receive you with open arms, and who will to-morrow—rather, in a few hours’ time—herself conduct you to the abode of your friends in Stamford Street, or to your own home near Streatham.”

With these words, the nobleman took the hand of the blushing Agnes, and led her from the house to the vehicle that was still waiting.

“Now, madam, you may depart,” he said sternly to Mrs. Mortimer, as soon as he had seated himself in the cab, opposite to Agnes.

The old woman turned sulkily away, muttering threats of vengeance; but these were unheeded by the chivalrous Trevelyan, who gave hasty instructions to the driver, and the vehicle rolled rapidly on towards Kentish Town.

Agnes could not do otherwise than appreciate all the delicacy of Lord William’s conduct towards her; for it is no disparagement to the extreme artlessness of her mind to state that she comprehended wherefore he had compelled Mrs. Mortimer to wait until they had quitted the house. But she could scarcely collect her bewildered ideas into a settled state—so rapid was the whirl of incident and adventures through which she was doomed to pass on this memorable night. Had she paused to reflect upon her position, with that seriousness which it required, she would have requested the nobleman to conduct her at once to the dwelling of the Misses Theobald: but he had deported himself towards her with the generosity of a brother, and she acted in obedience to his suggestions without waiting to analyse them. In a word, she was full of confidence and ingenuous reliance in him; and she felt as if she had suddenly found a staunch and sincere friend in the midst of cruel difficulties and deep embarrassments. A dreamy kind of repose stole over her as she was borne along in the vehicle: and yet she not only heard the few remarks which her companion addressed to her, but likewise answered them in a befitting manner.

On his side Trevelyan was a prey to the strangest excitement; accident having not only thus procured him the acquaintanceship of her whom he loved so fondly, but having likewise placed them in a relative position, establishing as it were a friendship—almost an intimacy. Moreover, had he not touched her delicate white hand—touched it gently, it is true, and without venturing to press it,—but still touched it, and even held it for a few moments in his own? Had he not discovered, too, that if she appeared surpassingly lovely when seen from a distance, a nearer contemplation of her charms was only calculated to enhance his admiration and strengthen his devotion? And, lastly, had not the musical tones of her silver voice been breathed in his hearing, wafting words that were addressed to himself, and making every fibre in his heart vibrate deliciously to the dulcet sounds? Yes—



all this he felt and appreciated; and he was happy.

The conversation that passed between them during the drive to Kentish Town was slight, and chiefly confined to such observations as a well-bred gentleman would address to a lady under circumstances of embarrassment, and to such responses as those remarks were calculated to elicit. The young nobleman was careful to avoid any allusion to the letter which he had sent to Agnes, or to the circumstances that had thus thrown them so singularly together; and she, understanding his forbearance and perceiving his unwillingness to take the least advantage of her peculiar position, felt her esteem—we might almost say her *love*—increase in his favour.

In about twenty minutes the cab stopped at the gate of a beautiful villa; and as the orient sky was now flickering with the first struggling beams of a summer sunrise, Agnes was enabled to obtain a tolerably distinct view of the picturesque spot. The fresh breeze, too, fanned her countenance, recalling the roses to her damask cheeks; and as she

threw back the shining masses of hair from her forehead, Trevelyan's eye could trace the blue veins so delicately marked beneath the white skin of that fair and polished brow.

On alighting at the entrance to the villa, Trevelyan and his beautiful companion were both struck by the glimmering of lights which shone through the divisions in the parlour shutters, and the rays of which, peeping forth, struggled with sickly effect against the dawning of a new day. Those lights, too, were evidently moving about; and it was therefore clear that the inmates of the dwelling were astir even at that early hour.

The summons at the front door was almost immediately responded to by a female servant, who, in reply to the young nobleman's questions, stated that Mrs. Sefton was at home, and had risen thus early in order to make preparations for removal to a new house which she had taken in another suburb of London.

Trevelyan and Agnes were accordingly admitted forthwith; and the domestic conducted them to the parlour, where Mrs. Sefton was busily engaged in

packing up her effects. She was much surprised when she heard Trevelyan's voice, and immediately apprehended that some misfortune was in store for her—some evil tidings, perhaps, relative to Sir Gilbert Heathcote.

But scarcely had Agnes reached the threshold of the apartment, when—the moment Mrs. Sefton turned to receive her visitors—the young girl gave vent to an ejaculation of mingled astonishment and joy, and, bounding forward, was in the next instant clasped in that lady's arms.

"My dearest—dearest mother!"

"Agnes—my beloved child!"

These were the words which explained to Trevelyan the scene that he now witnessed.

CHAPTER CLXXX.

EXPLANATIONS.

THE reader need scarcely be informed that if Lord William were amazed at the discovery of the relationship subsisting between two ladies whom he had hitherto deemed to be perfect strangers to each other, Mrs. Sefton was not less astonished at having her daughter thus unexpectedly introduced into her presence and at such an unseasonable hour.

For a few minutes, however, she had no leisure for reflection,—joy at once more being enabled to strain that beloved child to her bosom triumphing over all other considerations.

But when the first gush of feeling had somewhat subsided, a horrible suspicion entered her mind.

Could Lord William have seduced Agnes away from the care of those friends to whom she was consigned?—could he have entertained the vile and derogatory idea of using the villa as the receptacle for a young creature whom he intended to make his mistress?—did he suppose that Mrs. Sefton would lend herself to such an atrocious proceeding?—and had he unconsciously brought the child to the house of the mother, thinking to make a pander of the latter to the dishonour of the former?

All these thoughts flashed with lightning rapidity to Mrs. Sefton's mind, as, disengaging herself from the embraces of Agnes, she turned towards Lord William, and, with flashing eyes and quivering lips, peremptorily demanded an explanation of the circumstances which had rendered him the companion of her daughter at such an hour.

Trevelyan instantly divined what was passing in the lady's bosom; and, perceiving at once the awkwardness of his position and the grounds of her suspicions, he hastily gave such explanations as were satisfactory to Mrs. Sefton, Agnes herself corroborating the main facts.

"Pardon me, my dear friend," said the now happy mother, taking Trevelyan's hand and pressing it fervently in token of gratitude,—“pardon me if for a moment I entertained the most unjust and derogatory suspicions.”

"Mention them not, madam," exclaimed Trevelyan warmly: “but let your daughter seek that repose which she must so deeply need—and I will then, as a man of honour, explain to you how I became interested in her, and how it was that the Mrs. Mortimer whose name has already been mentioned happened to bring her to my house.”

A slight smile—almost of archness—played upon the lips of Mrs. Sefton, as she turned towards Agnes,—a smile which seemed to intimate that she

already knew more than the young nobleman fancied, but was not vexed with him in consequence of the facts thus known to her.

"Come with me, dearest girl," she said, addressing her daughter, “and I will conduct you to a chamber where you may obtain a few hours' repose. You need not bid farewell to his lordship; for I have no doubt he will honour us with his presence at breakfast—when you will see him again.”

Agnes blushed and cast down her eyes—she scarcely knew why—as these words met her ears;—and again the arch smile played upon her mother's lips. Trevelyan observed that there was some mystery, though not of a disagreeable nature, in Mrs. Sefton's manner; and in a moment—with galvanic swiftness—the reminiscence of the tears upon the portrait and the lost letter flashed to his mind.

The ladies disappeared, and Trevelyan threw himself in a chair, to muse upon the discovery which he had thus made, and which was well calculated to afford him pleasure, inasmuch as it was evident from Mrs. Sefton's manner and the significant words she had uttered relative to the meeting at the breakfast-table, that she was *not* inimical to his suit.

In a few minutes she returned to the room.

"My dear madam," said Trevelyan, rising and advancing to meet her, “you already know that I love your daughter Agnes—that I adore her?”

"And you have already divined how the letter which you must have missed, came to be lost?" returned Mrs. Sefton, with a smile.

"Yes, madam—and I likewise observed the trace of a tear upon the portrait which I painted from memory," continued the young nobleman.

"Oh! then you can make allowance for the feelings of a mother!" exclaimed Mrs. Sefton, with enthusiasm: “and you will forgive me that act of apparent ingratitude—nay, of treachery—I mean the purloining of a document so sacred as a sealed letter—and at a moment, too, when I sought your aid, and you so generously afforded it?”

"It is for me to implore your pardon as a mother for having dared to address such a letter to your daughter," said Trevelyan, with some degree of embarrassment.

"Then let us accord mutual forgiveness," exclaimed the lady, extending her hand, which was immediately pressed with the fervour of gratitude. “I am well aware that my conduct in taking that letter was improper to a degree,” she continued, after a short pause: “but pray consider all the circumstances.”

"I do—I do," interrupted Trevelyan; “and you have nothing to explain. Oh! I am delighted at the discovery that the beautiful and much-loved Agnes is your daughter—delighted also to think that, by the perusal of that letter, you have acquired the certainty of the ardent and honourable feelings which animate me with regard to her.”

"And Agnes is deserving of your affection, my lord," said Mrs. Sefton: “I am convinced that she is in heart and soul all she appears to be—ingeniousness, amiability, candour, and virtue!”

"Oh! I am well assured of the value of that jewel which, in due time, I shall implore you to bestow upon me!" exclaimed the generous and impassioned young nobleman: “and I rejoice that you not only observed the letter in my apartment, but that you also took it; for it has—”

"It has enabled me to discover my child, whom I had fruitlessly sought for years, and whom I

longed to embrace!" added Mrs. Sefton, wiping away the tears of joy that started to her eye-lashes. "Oh! my lord, you may conceive my surprise—my joy, when I beheld that portrait in your portfolio. Although I had never seen my child since her infancy, yet it seemed as if a heavenly inspiration imparted to me the conviction that I was then gazing on her likeness. At all events I murmured to myself, while contemplating it, '*Such must Agnes now be: tall, beautiful, and with innocence depicted in her countenance, even as this portrait.*' And then I wept as I thought that the dear girl was lost to me for ever—buried in some seclusion by one who cruelly kept us separated! I closed the portfolio—rose—and mechanically approached the mantel. There I beheld the letter—and the address immediately rivetted my attention. '*Miss Agnes Vernon!*' Oh! yes—it was my own dear daughter whose portrait I had been contemplating; and I was not mistaken! For I may be allowed to say, without incurring the imputation of vanity, that in the countenance of the portrait I traced my own lineaments; and then—on discovering the letter—I felt assured that nature's promptings had not been misinterpreted by me! Because I knew that Agnes passed under the name of Vernon: that fact I accidentally learnt years ago, through my husband's solicitor, who was permitted from time to time to give me the assurance that my daughter was alive and in health. You can now conceive, my dear friend, how strong were the emotions which agitated within me, and which influenced me in seizing upon the letter—tearing it open—and devouring its contents."

"And your first impression was doubtless one of indignation against me for having dared thus to address your daughter?" said Lord William Trevelyan.

"Far from it, I can assure you!" returned Mrs. Sefton, in a tone of the deepest sincerity. "I already knew enough of your character to be well aware that you were honourable in principle and generous in heart; and the whole tenour of the letter was respectful and delicate, though earnest and decided," added the lady, with a smile, as Trevelyan's cheeks were suffused with a deep blush. "Besides, my dear friend," she continued, in a serious tone, "I have acquainted you with the history of the crushed hopes and the blighted affections of my own early years—and I should be the last person in the world to raise an obstacle in the way of a pure and honourable attachment on the part of those in whom I felt interested."

"Then you approve of my suit in respect to your daughter?" exclaimed Trevelyan, his handsome countenance becoming animated with joy; "and you will not refuse me her hand?"

"When she attains her twenty-first year, my lord," replied Mrs. Sefton, in a solemn tone. "Until then I dare not dispose of her hand in marriage. She is now nineteen——"

"Two years to wait!" exclaimed Trevelyan, mournfully: "and in the mean time how many adverse circumstances may occur to separate us!"

"Yours is the age when Hope smiles most brightly," said Mrs. Sefton; "and if your affection for my daughter be as strong as you represent it, believe me, my dear friend, that time will not impair—but rather strengthen and confirm it."

"Were years and years to elapse, ere Agnes could become mine, I should not love her the less!" ex-

claimed Lord William. "But this may not be so with her: indeed, I have no reason to hope—much less any assurance—that she in any degree reciprocates my passion."

"Agnes will not prove indifferent to your lordship's merits," said Mrs. Sefton, encouragingly. "But we must postpone any farther conversation on this subject until another occasion. Behold the confusion that prevails in the house," she continued, in a more cheerful tone, as she glanced round the room at the various boxes and packages on which she had been busied when the arrival of Trevelyan and her daughter had compelled her to desist from her occupation. "I am about to remove this morning to a beautiful little villa which I have taken at Bayswater. By those means I hope to destroy all trace of my new abode, in respect to those who might seek to tear Agnes from my arms. But I have the law with me:—yes, the law is in my favour," she added, in an emphatic tone; "and I will not surrender up my daughter to him——"

She checked herself, and hastily advancing to the window, opened the shutters.

It was now quite light; and, having extinguished the candles, Mrs. Sefton returned to her task of placing various valuable effects in a box. Trevelyan volunteered his assistance, which was accepted; for circumstances had placed him and the lady on a footing of the most friendly intimacy together.

"I received your note on my return last evening," said Mrs. Sefton, after a pause; "and I regretted much to find that you had obtained no clue to the place where Sir Gilbert Heathcote is confined."

"But you must remember, my dear madam, that no time has been lost," observed Trevelyan. "It was only yesterday morning that we acquired the knowledge of Sir Gilbert's real position; and I have employed my valet Fitzgeorge, who is an intelligent and faithful man, to obtain an interview with Green, Heathcote's clerk, and bribe him to serve us. From the specimen of the fellow's character which we had yesterday morning in this very room, I entertain but little doubt of Fitzgeorge's success."

"God grant that it may be so!" exclaimed Mrs. Sefton, fervently. "And if you succeed in discovering the den where Sir Gilbert is confined, how do you intend to proceed?"

"Still by artifice, my dear madam. We must fight that bad man, James Heathcote, with his own weapons——"

"Oh! think you not, my lord, that our unfortunate friend is hemmed round with all imaginable precautions to prevent his flight?" demanded Mrs. Sefton.

"Doubtless," answered Trevelyan: "but the janitors and dependants of a lunatic asylum are as accessible as other people to the influence of gold."

"I now more than ever, if possible, desire the restoration of Sir Gilbert," said Mrs. Sefton: then, after a pause, she added in a low and peculiar tone, "I have many—many strange things yet to tell you, Lord William: but the present is not the most fitting occasion. In a few days I will explain every thing—yes, everything," she said, emphatically; "and thenceforth there will be no secrets between you and me."

The lady again applied herself to the task of preparing for her removal; and the young nobleman

assisted her with as much kindness of manner and good-tempered alacrity as if he were her brother, or already her son-in-law. In this manner the hours passed away until the time-piece struck nine, when Agnes descended to the breakfast which was now served up. A messenger was despatched to the Misses Theobald to give them an assurance of the young maiden's safety; and in the course of the day the mother and daughter, accompanied by Lord William, removed to the beautiful villa prepared for the ladies' reception at Bayswater.

Lord William remained with them until the evening, when he took his leave—but not without observing that pleasure beamed in the eyes of Agnes as he intimated his intention of becoming a frequent visitor at the villa.

CHAPTER CLXXXII.

LAURA MORTIMER'S NEW INTRIGUES.

WE must now return to Laura Mortimer, whom we left in Paris, and of whom we have lost sight for some time.

It was in the evening of the fourth day after the incidents recorded in the preceding chapter, that Laura was seated in her handsome drawing-room, wrapped up in deep meditation.

Her thoughts were not, however, of a disagreeable nature;—for ever and anon the fire of triumph flashed from her fine eyes, and her rich moist lips were wreathed into a smile.

She held a book open in her hand; but her gaze was fixed upon the ceiling as she lay, rather than sate, on the voluptuous cushions of the purple velvet ottoman.

The windows were open, and a gentle evening breeze, which had succeeded the stifling heat of a Parisian summer-day, fanned her countenance and wanted with the luxuriant ringlets that floated over her naked shoulders,—those shoulders so white, so plump, so exquisitely shaped!

The perfumes of choice flowers and the odour of ravishing oriental scents rendered the atmosphere fragrant: gold and silver fish were disporting in an immense crystal globe which stood upon a marble table between the casements;—and two beautiful canaries were carolling in a superb cage suspended in one of those open windows.

On the table near which Laura was placed, stood several crystal dishes containing the finest fruit that the Parisian market could yield,—the luscious pine, the refreshing melon, strawberries of extraordinary size and exquisite flavour, cherries of the richest red, and mulberries of the deepest purple.

A bottle of champagne stood in a cooler filled with ice; and in the middle of the table was a superb nosegay of flowers.

The entire appearance of the room and its appointments was luxurious in the extreme,—comfort being combined with elegance, and the means of enjoyment distributed with taste;—while she—the mistress of the place—the presiding genius of the scene—was pillowed voluptuously upon the immense velvet cushions. So complete was the abandonment of her attitude, in her deep reverie, that she seemed ten hundred times more charming than when her artifice devised a thousand studied graces in order to effect a conquest and captivate a lover.

One of her naked arms, plump, white, and beauti-

fully formed, lay across her person as the hand held the book, on which the eyes rested not, and against the dark binding of which the taper fingers were set off in the dazzling purity of their complexion and the rosy tint of the almond-shaped nails: the other arm hung down negligently—not quite straight, but gently rounded—the fingers of that hand playing mechanically with the ottoman's golden fringe that swept the thick carpet. One of her legs lay stretched completely upon the ottoman: the other hung over the side, displaying the well-formed foot, the delicate ankle, and the robust swell of the calf. More voluptuously modelled than Venus, but with all the elegance attributed to the form of that fabled divinity,—handsome as Juno, without the stern imperiousness that characterised the queen of heaven,—and with that subdued nobility of demeanour which Diana, when out of sight of her attendant huntresses, might have been supposed to wear,—Laura Mortimer united in her own person the most fascinating of the charms belonging to the three principal goddesses of heathen worship.

“But let us endeavour to ascertain the subject of her thoughts, as she lay thus wrapped up in a deep reverie.

“Fortune appears resolved to favour me, and I accept the auspicious omen with joy. The Marquis is in my power—is my slave—inextricably shackled by my silken chains! Four short days have been sufficient to accomplish this victory. When first introduced to him in the Champs Elysées, I saw that he regarded me with attention—nay, with admiration; and I that moment signalled him out as the man who is destined to place me in a proud position—to render me independent of Charles Hatfield's hated father! The evening before last I met him for the second time: this was at the party given by my music-master. The nobleman was almost instantly by my side, as soon as I made my appearance; and I knew full well how to gain his favour. When handsome young men approached me, I received them coldly, and continued my discourse with the Marquis in a more animated and friendly style than before. I even hinted to him—or rather suffered him to believe that it was a relief to escape from the frivolities of the average run of conversation, in the indulgence of discourse on intellectual subjects. I saw that the old man was flattered—that he thought highly of me: in a word, I secured his esteem as I had already acquired his admiration. We sat next to each other at supper; and he lavished all his attentions upon me—attentions which I accepted with an air as if they came from a young and handsome gallant. The Marquis handed me to my carriage, and solicited permission to call. I signified an assent with an ingenuousness that could not possibly have seemed affected; and he squeezed my hand slightly as he bade me farewell. On the following afternoon he called: this was yesterday—and he remained a long time. Two hours passed—doubtless like two minutes to him; and I was completely triumphant. Never did I appear to such advantage: my glass told me that I was radiantly beautiful—and I could observe full well that my manner—my conversation—and the delicate artifices I called to aid, were pre-eminently successful. The old man was ready to fall upon his knees and worship me: he was in that humour when he would have laid his whole fortune at my feet. He appeared to be longing to throw his arms around my

neck, and exclaim, '*La I adore you!*' But when I had excited him to the highest possible pitch, I suddenly directed his attention to some subject of comparative indifference; and thus did I play with his feelings during two long hours. He went away half crazy—dazzled, bewildered, not knowing what to think or how to act—intoxicated with sensual passions mingling with the purer sentiments of a profound admiration and a cordial esteem. Then this morning he called again, and I made him become my companion at luncheon. I affected to be rejoiced that he had thus unexpectedly dropped in, as I had previously felt low-spirited and dull. He seemed charmed that his presence was calculated to cheer me: it was a delicate compliment paid to his conversational powers—and he was flattered and pleased. Oh! how admirably did I wind myself, as it were, around him during the three hours that he remained with me this morning: how successfully did I insinuate myself, as one may say, into his very soul;—not seizing upon his heart by a sudden attack—but gaining possession of it by means the more sure because so stealthy,—not carrying that heart by storm—but gradually and imperceptibly enmeshing it in snares and toils whence it never can escape, so long as my *real* character shall remain a mystery to him. Yes—and this morning, too, was he not a thousand times on the point of falling upon his knees, and exclaiming, '*Laura, I adore you!*' But still I tantalised him—still I worked him up to the highest possible pitch of excitement, and then suddenly discouraged him by some word or gesture that threw a coldness on all I had before said, and which yet would admit of no positive interpretation so as to render him hopeless altogether. And now he is to return again—this evening,—to return, by his own solicitation;—and this evening—yes—this evening," thought Laura, her lips wreathing into a smile of triumph,—"*he shall fall down at my feet and exclaim, 'Laura, I adore you!'*"

Thus ran the meditations of this dangerous woman,—so strong in the consciousness of her almost superhuman beauty—so confident in the power of her matchless charms and in the witchery of her guileful tongue!

"Yes—four days will have been sufficient to reduce the proud English noble to the condition of a captive kneeling at my feet," she continued, in her silent but triumphant reverie. "What other woman in the world can thus effect a conquest with such amazing rapidity? The tigress hunts for her prey—pursuing the affrighted deer through bramble and through brake—by the margin of the lake in the depths of the forest—amidst the trackless mazes of the wild woods,—a long—tedious—and fatiguing chase, with the possibility of escape for the intended victim after all. But the boa-constrictor fixes its eyes upon its prey—fascinates it—renders it incapable of retreat—compels it even to advance nearer and nearer to its mouth—plays with it—tantalizes it—sets every feeling and every emotion into fluttering agitation—and even when about to gorge it, licks it over with his caresses. And thus do I secure my prey! I am the anaconda amongst women: none whom I choose to make my victim can escape from the influence of my witchery—the sphere of my fascination! With me it is no long, tedious, and wearisome chase: 'tis instantaneous capture and an easy triumph!"

And again the peculiar smile—half haughtiness,

half sweetness—returned to the lips of the peerless beauty, who felt herself to be ten thousand times more powerful in the possession of her transcendent charms, than an Amazonian Queen clothed in armour of proof from head to heel.

Suddenly the bell at the outer door of her suite of apartments announced the coming of a visitor; and in a few moments the Marquis of Delmour was ushered into the room.

Laura had already assumed a sitting posture; and she now rose to receive the English nobleman.

"Good evening, charming Miss Mortimer," said the Marquis, taking her hand and gently touching it with his lips: then, leading her to the ottoman, and placing himself at a short distance from her, he looked at her tenderly, observing, "You perceive that I am punctual to the hour at which I was to make my appearance according to the kind permission you granted me."

"Your lordship is most generous thus to condescend to enliven an hour that would otherwise be passed in loneliness by me," said Laura, bending upon him all the glory of her fine bright eyes and revealing the splendour of her brilliant teeth.

"Beautiful, intellectual, and agreeable as you are, Miss Mortimer," observed the nobleman, "it is utterly impossible that you can feel yourself indebted to an old man like me for the recreation of a leisure hour. You would only need to throw open your drawing-rooms to the *élite* of Paris, to be surrounded by admiring guests."

"And what if I prefer an hour of intellectual conversation to an entire evening of empty formalities, ceremonial frivolities, and the inane routine of fashionable *réunions*?" asked Laura, with an affectation of candour which seemed most real—most natural.

"You possess a mind the strength and soundness of which surprise me," exclaimed the Marquis of Delmour, enthusiastically. "How is it that, rich and beautiful, young and courted, as you are, you can have taken so just a view of the world,—that you have learnt to prefer solid enjoyments to artificial pleasures,—and that you can so well discriminate between the *real* on which the gay and giddy close their eyes, and the *ideal* or the *unreal* which they so much worship?"

"You would ask me, my lord, I presume, wherefore I dislike that turmoil of fashionable life which brings one in contact with persons who flatter in a meaningless manner, and who believe that a woman is best pleased with him who most skilfully gilds his *pretty nothings*. It is, my lord, because I do not estimate the world according to the usual standard,—because I am not dazzled by outside glitter and external show. If an officer in the army be introduced to me, I am not captivated by his splendid epaulets and his waving plumes: I wait to hear him discourse before I form my estimate of his character."

"Then neither youth nor riches will prove the principal qualifications of him who shall be fortunate enough to win your hand?" said the Marquis, fixing his eyes in an impassioned manner upon the syron.

"Oh! you would speak to me upon the topic of marriage?" exclaimed Laura, laughing gaily. "To tell your lordship the truth, I should be sorry to surrender up my freedom beyond all possibility of release, to any man in existence."

"What!" ejaculated the old nobleman: "do

you mean me to infer that you will never marry?"

"I have more than half made up my mind to that resolution," responded Laura, casting down her eyes and forcing a blush to her cheeks.

"Never marry!" cried the Marquis, in unfeigned surprise. "And what if you happened to fall in love with some fine, handsome, eligible young man?"

"In the first place it is by no means necessary that a man should be fine, handsome, or young for me to love him," answered Laura, as if in the most ingenuous way in the world; "and when I do love, it is not a whit the more imperious that the parson or the priest should rivet my hand to that of the object of my affections. It is within the power of man to unite hands—and that is a mockery: but God alone can unite hearts—and that is a solemn and sacred compact that should be effected in the sight of heaven only."

"I scarcely understand you, beautiful and mysterious being!" exclaimed the Marquis, drawing nearer to the syren, who did not appear to notice the movement.

"I am aware that some of my notions are not altogether in accordance with those of society in general," observed Laura, with an affectation of reserve and diffidence: "but since the conversation has taken this turn, I do not hesitate to admit that I do hold peculiar opinions with respect to marriage."

"You would have me understand, Miss Mortimer," said the Marquis, "that were you to find your affections onchained by some deserving individual, you would not hesitate to join your destinies to his, without the intervention of the Church to cement the union?"

"Your lordship has interpreted my meaning in language so delicate as to be almost ambiguous," observed Laura. "And yet why should the truth be thus wrapped up in verbiage? I do not entertain opinions which I am afraid to look in the face. God forbid! In a word, then, I would ten thousand times rather become the mistress of the man I loved, than the wife of him whom I abhorred;—and in loving the former, and with him loving me, is it not that union of hearts which, as I ere now said, should be effected only in the sight of heaven?"

"And have you ever yet loved?" asked the nobleman, in a tone of profound emotion, as he gazed long and ardently upon the splendid countenance whereon the light from the casements now fell with a Rembrandt effect, delineating the faultless profile against the obscurity that had already begun to occupy the end of the room most remote from the windows.

"Oh! my lord, that is a question which you can only ask me when we come to know each other better!" exclaimed Laura, after a few moments' pause.

"And yet I already feel as if I had known you for as many years as our acquaintance numbers days," said the Marquis. "Methought yesterday—and this morning too—that a species of intimacy—a kind of impromptu friendship had sprung up between us; and now you are somewhat cold towards me—your manner is not the same—"

"If I have been guilty of any want of courtesy towards your lordship, I should be truly—deeply grieved," exclaimed Laura, surveying the nobleman

with well affected astonishment at the accusation uttered against her.

"Oh! use not such chilling language, Laura—Miss Mortimer, I mean!" cried the old nobleman, half inclined to throw himself at her feet and implore her to take compassion upon him. "But I am mad—I am insane to appeal to you thus!" he continued, in a species of rage against himself. "How can I suppose that the society of an old man like me is agreeable to a young and beautiful creature such as you?—how can I give way to those glorious but fatal delusions that have occupied my brain for the last forty-eight hours? Oh! Miss Mortimer—would that I had never seen you!"

And the old nobleman, covering his face with his hands, literally sobbed like a youthful lover quarrelling with an adored mistress.

"My lord—my lord, what have I done to offend you?" demanded Laura, as if deeply excited; and, seizing his hands, she drew them away from his countenance, well aware that the contact of her soft and warm flesh would make the blood that age had partially chilled, circulate with speed and heat in his veins.

"If you had attempted my life," replied the Marquis, with fervid emphasis, "I should rejoice at a deed that would elicit such kindness from you as you manifest towards me now!"

And thus speaking, he raised her hands to his lips and covered them with kisses.

"Tell me—how did I offend you?" she asked, in a voice that was melting and musical even to ravishment.

"Oh! let us think not of what has passed," he exclaimed: "but bless me with the assurance that you can entertain a sentiment of friendship for the old man!"

"I would rather possess your friendship, my lord, than that of the handsomest and wealthiest young gentleman whom we met at the party the other evening," responded the artful woman, still abandoning her hands to the Marquis. "Did you not observe that I was pleased with your attentions—that I refused to dance in order that I might remain seated next to you, and listening to your conversation—that when the gay moths of fashion approached me with their fulsome compliments, I exhibited signs of impatience, and by my coldness compelled them to retreat—that I gave no encouragement to them in any way—"

"Yes—yes," interrupted the enraptured Marquis: "I noticed all *that*—and were I a young man I should have felt myself justified in addressing you in the language of passion—aye, of ardent and sincere affection. But—although such are indeed my sentiments towards you—I perceive all the folly and ridicule of daring to give utterance to them in your presence: yet God knows that I am ready to lay my fortune at your feet—and could I offer to place the coronet of a marchioness upon your brow—"

"Were you in the position to do so, I should refuse it," said Laura, emphatically. "All the rest I might listen to—"

"Then you are aware that I am married?" interrupted the nobleman, fixing an earnest and enquiring gaze upon her beautiful countenance.

"Rumour declares as much," replied Laura; "and it likewise avers that you are not happy in your matrimonial connexion. I pity you from the bottom of my heart—and I behold in the fact itself

a new argument in support of my own peculiar tenets relative to marriage-ties;—for assuredly you are endowed with qualities calculated to render a woman happy—or I am deeply, deeply deceived.”

“Ah! it is a sad tale—and I dare not venture upon the narration now,” said the Marquis, with a profound sigh. “But should our acquaintance continue—as I ardently hope it may—I will some day give you the fullest and most ample explanations. And you yourself, charming creature—is there not some mystery attached to you? How happens it that at your age you should be so well acquainted with the world?—how is it that you seem free to follow the bent of your own inclinations, uncontrolled even by your mother? For rumour declares that you have a mother alive—”

“I am independent of her in a pecuniary point of view, my lord,” interrupted Laura; “and I am determined to consult my own ideas of happiness, instead of adopting the standard of enjoyment and pleasure established by the fashionable world.”

“Would to heavens that it lay in my power to ensure your happiness—or even to contribute to it!” exclaimed the Marquis, gazing upon her with admiration and ardent passion. “Long years have elapsed since I encountered any woman who inspired me with even half the interest that I feel in you; and it seems to me that I become young again when in your sweet society.”

“And, on my side,” answered Laura, casting down her eyes and assuming a bashful demeanour, “I do not hesitate to admit that I experience greater enjoyment from your conversation than from that of any other nobleman or gentleman with whom I am acquainted.”

“Just now, my sweet Miss Mortimer said the Marquis, approaching still nearer to her, and speaking in a tone that was low and tremulous with emotion,—“just now you declared that ‘*all the rest you might listen to*’—”

“And I do not attempt to revoke the admission that thus fell from my lips,” murmured the designing young woman, turning a glance of half-timidty and half-fondness upon the old nobleman, who, in spite of a strong and vigorous intellect, was rendered childish and plunged as it were into dotage by the fascinating—ravishing influence of the siren-enchantress.

“What am I to understand by those words?” he asked, in an ecstasy of delight. “Oh! is it possible that you can become something more to the old man than a mere acquaintance—something more than even a friend—”

“I could wish to retain your good opinion—your esteem for ever!” said Laura, now turning upon him a countenance radiant with hope and joy.

“It is scarcely possible—I am dreaming—’tis a delicious delusion—a heavenly vision!” murmured the Marquis in broken sentences,—for he was dazzled by the transcendent beauty of the houri who seemed to encourage him in the aspirations which he had formed.

“Is it, then, so extraordinary that I should have learnt to love one who is so kind—so generous-hearted—so intellectual as yourself?” asked Laura, leaning towards him so that her fragrant breath fanned his countenance and her forehead for an instant touched his own.

“Great heaven! is it possible that so much happiness awaits me?” cried the Marquis, scarcely able to believe his eyes or his ears: then, after gazing

upon her for a few instants with all the rapturous ardour of a youthful lover, he sank upon his knees before her, exclaiming, “*Laura, I adore you!*”

The designing woman’s triumph was complete: the Marquis was inextricably entangled in her snares;—and, throwing her arms around his neck, she murmured, “Oh! it is an honour as well as a joy to possess your love!”

Then the old man covered the charming young woman’s countenance with kisses; and for several minutes not a word was spoken between them. But at length the Marquis, who could scarcely believe that he had won a prize the possession of which all the noblest, handsomest, and wealthiest young men in Paris would envy him, began to speak upon the course which it would be prudent for them to adopt. Laura at once gave him to understand that she should experience no sentiment of shame in appearing as his mistress; and she undertook—as well indeed she might do—to reconcile her mother to this connexion which she had formed.

“Let us then return to England without delay,” said the Marquis. “The business which has brought me to Paris is now in such a position that an agent may manage it for me. But tell me—is your mother dependent upon you?”

“Entirely,” answered Laura, anticipating the course which her noble lover was about to adopt.

“And your fortune is doubtless large?” he continued, interrogatively.

“It is not nearly so large as rumour has alleged,” was the reply. “Still it is a handsome competency for one person.”

“Then, as there shall be nothing having even the slightest appearance of selfishness in my attachment towards you, Laura,” resumed the nobleman, “you must immediately assign all your property to your mother; and I will at once—yes, at once—give you a proof of the boundless devotion with which you have inspired me. Permit me the use of your desk for a few moments.”

Laura rang the bell, and ordered Rosalie to bring writing materials; and when this was done, the marquis seated himself at the table and wrote something upon a sheet of paper. He next penned a letter, which he folded up, sealed, and addressed; and, turning towards Laura, he said, “This draught, beloved girl, is for the sum of sixty thousand pounds, payable at sight at my bankers’ in London. This letter, which you will have the kindness to send through the post to-morrow, is to advise them of the fact, of such a cheque having been given, and to prepare them to meet it, so that there may be no hesitation in paying such a large amount. For it will be my joy and delight to enrich you, my dearest Laura; so that the old man may to some extent repay the immense obligation under which he is placed by the possession of such a heart as thine. I would not have you remain wealthy through your own resources: henceforth you must owe every thing to me—for if you cannot be my wife in name, you shall at least be the sharer of my fortune, as you have consented to be the partner of my destinies.”

“Your generosity, my dear Marquis, only binds me the more closely to you,” exclaimed Laura, lavishing upon the old man the most exciting and apparently fervent caresses. “At the same time permit me to remind you that there is nothing selfish in that affection which so suddenly sprang up in my bosom towards you: because I am no needy adventurer—no intriguing fortune-hunter,—and you are

well aware that many a French nobleman would be proud to lay his title at my feet, were I disposed to decorate my brow with a coronet. My father—who, as you have doubtless heard, accumulated some money in India—left me well provided for; and that fortune I shall cheerfully abandon to my mother, preferring to remain dependent on yourself."

"Ah! your father dwelt a long time in India!" exclaimed the Marquis, as if struck by a sudden idea. "Is it possible, then, that I could have encountered your mother in England? But, no—that woman could not have been the parent of such a lovely, charming creature as yourself!"

"To whom do you allude, my lord?" demanded Laura, now seized with the apprehension that her mother might be known to the wealthy lover whom she had succeeded in ensnaring, and whom she intended to fleece of the greater portion of his fortune.

"It was but a momentary thought—it exists no longer in my mind, dearest," responded the nobleman, who, as he gazed upon the bright and splendid being before him, felt an ineffable disgust at having even for an instant associated her in any way with the loathsome old hag to whom he was alluding. "The fact is," he continued, "I met a certain female in London—or rather, in the neighbourhood of London—a short time ago—indeed, just before I left England; and this woman bore the name of Mortimer."

"It is not altogether an uncommon one," observed Laura, maintaining an unruffled countenance, though her heart palpitated with continued apprehension.

"The singularity of the coincidence is that the female to whom I am alluding announces herself as the widow of a General-officer who had died in India," resumed the Marquis.

"My lamented father was a merchant," said Laura.

"Then of course there can be no identity in that case," continued the nobleman. "Besides, having an intimate acquaintance with all military matters—as I myself held the post of Secretary at War many years ago, and have since taken a deep interest in that department—I am enabled to state that no General-officer of the name of Mortimer has recently died in India."

"The woman, then, of whom you are speaking, was an impostress?" said Laura, interrogatively.

"I have little doubt of it," answered the marquis. "But let us not dwell upon a subject so perfectly indifferent to us. We were talking of our plans. Will it suit you, dearest Laura, to quit Paris to-morrow, or the day after at latest?"

"To-morrow, if you will," the young woman hastened to reply: for she now trembled lest her mother should suddenly return and perhaps prove, though unintentionally, a marplot to all the plans which her intriguing disposition had conceived.

"To-morrow, then, be it," said the Marquis. "At noon I shall call for you in my travelling-chariot. We will return by easy stages to London; and, on our arrival in the English capital, the handsomest mansion that money can procure shall be fitted up with all possible speed for your abode."

"I care not for a splendid dwelling in London itself," replied Laura. "Rather let me have some beautiful and retired villa in the suburbs, where you can visit me at your leisure, and where we can pass

the hours together without intrusion on the part of a host of visitors."

Your ideas on this subject concur with mine," observed the Marquis, enchanted with the belief that Laura intended to retire from the fashionable world and devote herself wholly to him. "The seclusion of a charming villa will be delightful; and I think I can promise," he added with a smile, "that the said villa will have more of my company than my town mansion. But I shall now take my departure—although with reluctance: it is however necessary for me to make certain preparations this evening, as I am to leave Paris thus unexpectedly to-morrow. For a few hours, then, my Laura, adieu—adieu!"

The old man embraced the young woman with the most unfeigned—unaffected fondness; and as his arms were cast about her neck, and he felt her bosom heaving against his chest, he longed to implore her to allow him to remain with her until the morning—for the dalliance and the toyings he had already enjoyed had inflamed his blood, and he aspired to be completely happy without delay. But he feared lest he should offend her by any manifestations of sensual longings; for he flattered himself that the connexion which had commenced between them had its origin in sentiment on her side. He accordingly withdrew—but reluctantly—from her embrace; and took his departure, promising to call for her punctually at noon on the following day.

CHAPTER CLXXXIII.

AN UNEXPECTED VISIT AND A DREADED ARRIVAL.

THE moment Laura heard the outer door close behind the Marquis of Delmour, she exclaimed aloud, "I have triumphed! I have triumphed! He is in my power—he fell at my feet—he said, '*Laura, I adore you!*'—and the proof of his utter credulity is here—here!"

Thus speaking, she clutched the draught for sixty thousand pounds—devoured it with her eyes—and then secured it in her writing-desk.

"Yes: sixty thousand pounds!" she murmured to herself, as she resumed her voluptuously reclining position upon the ottoman;—"sixty thousand pounds—gained with but little trouble and in a short time! It would scarcely matter if I never touched another piece of gold from his purse; for I am now independent of him—of the hated Hatfields—of all the world! But I will not abandon my doating English Marquis in a hurry: I will not cast aside a nobleman who is so generous—so rich—so confiding! No—no: he will be worth two hundred thousand pounds to me;—and then—yes—then, I may espouse a peer of high title! My fortune, assured—my destiny is within the range of prophecy. I have taken a tremendous step this evening: an hour has seen me grow suddenly rich—already the possessor of sixty thousand pounds! Thanks to this more than human beauty of mine—thanks to that witchery of manner which I know so well how to assume—and thanks also to that fascinating influence wherewith I can invest my language at will, the Marquis has become my slave. Thus does the strong-minded—the resolute—the intellectual man



succumb to woman, when she dazzles him with her loveliness and bewilders him with her guile. Sixty thousand pounds now own me as their mistress! 'Tis glorious to possess great wealth: but 'tis an elysian happiness—a burning joy—a proud triumph to feel that I am released from the thralldom of those Hatfields—or rather from a state of dependence upon the father of him whom I lately loved so well! And my mother, too—my selfish, intriguing, deceitful old mother, who has ever hoped to make a profitable market of my charms, and hold despotic sway over me at the same time,—she is no longer necessary to me—and I may in a moment assert my independence should she dare to attempt to tyrannise again. The mad old fool! to fancy that she will succeed in discovering Torrens,—or, even if she did, to hope that she could compel him to disgorge the treasures which he has perilled his life here and his soul hereafter to gain! She will return to me penniless—totally dependent upon me; and I shall allow her a small income on condition that she locates herself in some obscure spot, whence her machinations and her intrigues cannot reach me. Not for worlds would I have her fastened to my

apron-strings in London—that London whither I am about to return, and where I may yet hope to punish that Mr. Hatfield who for a time so savagely triumphed over me! No—my mother must be forced into seclusion; her notoriety of character would ruin me. Constantly incurring the chance of being discovered as the Mrs. Slingsby of former years—certain to be recognised as the Mrs. Fitzhardinge who was arrested on suspicion of being concerned in the murder of the old miser—and having evidently entered into some intrigue which has brought her under the notice of the Marquis of Delmour, she can no longer be allowed to associate with me! *Her day has gone by—mine has scarcely begun.*"

Laura—the beautiful, wanton, unprincipled Laura—had reached this point in her musings, when she was startled by an unusually violent ringing at the front door bell; and in a few moments a gentleman burst into the room, his impatience having urged him to cast away all ceremony and dispense with the introductory agency of Rosalie, who had uttered an ejaculation of surprise on beholding him.

"Captain Barthelma!" cried Laura, in an astonishment which even surpassed that of her abigail.

"Yes—my angel: it is I!" exclaimed the enthusiastic young Italian, as, bounding towards Laura, he caught her in his arms.

His lips were instantaneously fastened to her ripe mouth; and, remembering the night of love and pleasure which she had passed with him, she experienced no vexation at his sudden and most unexpected appearance.

"Can you pardon me for this intrusion?" he demanded, at length loosening her from his embrace, but seating himself closely by her side on the ottoman and taking her hands in his own: "can you pardon me, I ask, adorable woman?" he repeated, gazing upon her in boundless and passionate admiration.

"It seems that it were useless to be offended with you," she replied, smiling with voluptuous sweetness.

"Oh! then you will not upbraid me—you will not reproach me with having broken the solemn promise that I made you to depart and seek to see you no more in Paris!" he exclaimed. "But even if you were inclined to be angry, Laura, it could not in justice be upon me that your wrath would fall. You must blame your own matchless beauty—you must take all the fault unto yourself. I feel that I cannot live without you. Ever since we parted, my brain has been in a ceaseless ferment—my soul a prey to incessant excitement. By day and by night has your lovely image been before me: by day and by night have I fancied that I heard your voice pouring forth the most eloquent music:—I have dreamt that your lips, breathing odours and bathed with sweets, were pressed to mine:—and your looks, beaming love, and happiness, and joy, have ever been fixed on mine! Oh! my imagination has maintained me in a condition of such pleasing pain that I have been in a species of restless elyrium,—a giddy and sometimes agonising whirl, although the scene was paradise! At length I could endure this state no longer: and when at a considerable distance from Paris, on the road to Italy, I suddenly and secretly quitted the service of the Grand Duke—"

"Oh! what madness—what insanity!" exclaimed Laura, grieved that the handsome young Castellan should have made so deep a sacrifice for her—inasmuch as his generous devotion had not only flattered her pride, but also touched her soul.

"It may be madness—it may be insanity," repeated Lorenzo Barthelma, with impassioned warmth: "but those words must in that case be taken only as other terms for the deepest—sincerest—and most ardent devotion. Were I a beggar on the face of the earth, I should have acted in the same manner; because I should have come to you—I should have thrown myself at your feet—I should have implored you to render me happy,—and in return I should have toiled from mornning to night to make up for the deficiency of my means."

"Generous Lorenzo!" exclaimed Laura, speaking with more sincerity than had characterized her words for years.

"Ah! then you are somewhat touched by my devotion, angelic woman!" cried the handsome young officer, drawing her still more closely towards him, and passing his arm round her slender waist. "But happily I am no pauper—fortunately I am not dependent upon my own exertions. When I was with you before, my adorable Laura, I told you that I possessed a competency; and I then offered to link my destinies with yours for ever.

Now my circumstances have materially altered—and I rejoice in the fact! For the French papers of this day contain intelligence of the death of my cousin, the Count of Carignano, at Montoni; and by that unexpected event I have succeeded alike to his title and his princely revenues."

"Oh! my beloved Lorenzo," exclaimed Laura now giving way to all that tenderness towards him which was really in accordance with her inclinations, but which her more selfish interests would have prompted her to subdue and stifle had not this last announcement met her ears: "Oh! my beloved Lorenzo," she cried, pressing closer to him, so that he could feel her bosom throbbing like the undulations of a mighty tide—for she was now powerfully excited, alike morally and sensually: "how can I reward—how recompense this generosity on your part?"

"By becoming my wife—yes, my wife, Laura—if you will," returned the enraptured young man. "For you know not how I love you—how intense is the passion with which you have inspired me. I am blind and deaf to all—everything, save your beauties and your witching voice. If you be the greatest profligate the world ever saw, I care not—so madly do I love you."

"And when this delirium shall have passed away, Lorenzo," murmured Laura, concealing her burning countenance on his breast, "you will repent the rashness which induced you to wed with one who had so easily abandoned herself to you when a complete stranger—and whom—whom—you knew to be unchaste even then!" she added, her voice becoming touchingly low and tremulously plaintive.

"To suspect even for an instant that I should ever repent of making you my wife, Laura, is to doubt my love," said the Count of Carignano—for such we may now call him; "and that wounds me to the very soul! 'Tis sufficient for me to know that you are an angel of beauty—and I reck not if you are a demoness in character. But that I am sure is impossible. Your loveliness may have led you into temptations, and your temperament may have induced you to yield: but that you are generous—good—amiable, I am convinced, Laura;—and that you will prove faithful to one who places all his own happiness in you, and who will study incessantly to promote yours—oh! of that I am well assured also. Say, then, my adored one—can you consent to become the Countess of Carignano, with a revenue of twelve thousand a year?"

"Not for the dross—oh! not for the despicable dross," murmured Laura, scarcely able to restrain her joy within reasonable bounds, and induco her suitor to believe that no selfish interests were mixed up with the motives for that assent which she was about to give,— "not for vile and sordid gold, Lorenzo, do I respond in the affirmative to the generous proposal that you have now made to me—because I myself am possessed of a fortune of sixty thousand pounds; but it is because I love you—yes—I love you, my handsome Lorenzo—"

"Say no more, Laura—beloved Laura!" interrupted the impassioned young nobleman, straining her to his breast: then fondly—oh! how fondly did he gaze upon her—upon her, that guileful woman—reading the reflection of his own voluptuous feelings in her fine large eyes, and then bestowing upon her the most ardent caresses.

Several minutes passed away,—minutes that glided by with rapid and silent wings;—and the

handsome pair scarcely noticed that a single second had elapsed since last they spoke.

"Tell me, my sweet Laura," at length said the Count, toying with the glossy and fragrant tresses of her hair,—“tell me what meant certain words which you addressed to me on that evening when I was first blessed with your kindness. You declared that you could not marry me, although you were not married—that you could not be my mistress, although you were not the mistress of another—and that you could not hold out any hope to me, although you were pledged to no other man.”

“That language, apparently so mysterious, is easily explained,” said Laura, forcing a deep blush into her cheeks as she spoke, and winding one of her snow-white and naked arms round her lover’s neck, so that the contact of the firm warm flesh against his cheek sent the blood rushing through his veins in boiling currents. “I had abandoned myself to you in a moment of caprice—no, of weakness—of passion, which I could not subdue: I had yielded to an invincible impulse, not knowing its nature, and not waiting to ask myself the question. But when you had been with me a short time, I felt that I could love you—yes—deeply, tenderly love you; and as I fancied that, even though you protested the contrary, you could entertain no lasting affection for me, but on the other hand would soon regret any hastily and rashly-formed connexion, I was resolved not to place my own heart in jeopardy, nor incur the risk of loving well and then sustaining a cruel disappointment. For I feared that you addressed me in an impassioned tone only because you were labouring under the delirium of passing excitement and strong though evanescent feelings. Thus was it, then—for my own sake—that I spoke mysteriously to you, in order to convince you of the necessity of seeing me no more. But now, my Lorenzo—now, that you have had several days to reflect upon the proposal which you then made me—now that I have received such unequivocal proofs of your love, and that I no longer fear lest you should be acting in obedience to a sudden impulse,—oh! now, I say, I can hesitate no longer—and I will become your wife!”

The Count of Carignano drank in the delicious poison of her words until his very soul was intoxicated; and loving so well as did this generous-hearted, confiding young man, he paused not for an instant to demand of himself whether he were loving wisely. But he was contented to risk all and everything,—happiness—honour—fame—and name,—in this marriage upon which he had set his mind:—he longed—he burnt—he craved to possess Laura altogether—to have her to himself;—and he felt jealous of all the rest of the world until the nuptial knot should have been tied. It is in this humour and in such a temperament that the highest peer will marry an actress, who would jump at an offer to become his pensioned mistress for a few hundreds a-year.

And Laura—what was passing in her mind? The readers may easily conceive: and yet, lest there should be one or two of imaginations so opaque as not to be able to divine her thoughts, we will describe them as succinctly as possible.

She had run down the institution of marriage when in conversation with the Marquis of Delmour, because she knew that he was already bound in matrimonial bonds, and that she therefore could not become his wife. The result was that she was

enabled to consent to become his mistress with much less apparent violation of decency, and without the risk of shocking his feelings. And his mistress she would have become, as she indeed promised, had not the arrival of the Count of Carignano turned her thoughts into an entirely new channel, and placed her interests altogether in a new light. From the moment that he announced his title and his wealth, Laura resolved to throw the poor Marquis of Delmour overboard and accept the proposals of the Italian nobleman.

In fact, Fortune appeared to favour Laura marvellously. Ere now she had beheld a coronet at the end of a vista of some years: in her musings, she had said, “The Marquis will be worth two hundred thousand pounds to me: and then I may espouse a peer of high title!” Such was her ambitious speculation previously to the arrival of Lorenzo: and now, since he had come, she no longer need pass through the apprenticeship of mistress to one nobleman in order to become the wife of another. No—a coronet was within her grasp: a few days—a few hours might behold her Countess of Carignano,—with a husband of whom she could not but be proud, and not with an animated corpse bound to her side.

Here was another triumph for Laura—another cause of glorification in the possession of those matchless charms which thus captivated so hastily and triumphed so effectually. Within a few short weeks she had seen Charles Hatfield—the Marquis of Delmour—and the Count of Carignano at her feet. The first and last had enjoyed her favours: the second was in anticipation of them—and, in that anticipation, had paid sixty thousand pounds. To the first she was wedded—and their marriage was a secret: to the last she had consented to be allied—and their union would be proclaimed to all the world!

Oh! associated with all these reflections, were triumphs—glorious triumphs for Laura Mortimer; and as those thoughts rushed through her mind, as she lay half embraced in the arms of the fond and doting Italian nobleman, the delicious rosininess of animation spread over her cheeks, and kindred fires flashed from under her long silken lashes.

“How beautiful art thou, my adored one!” exclaimed Carignano, as he contemplated the glorious loveliness of her looks: and then he pressed his lips to that mouth which was so voluptuously formed, and which rather resembled a luscious fruit than anything belonging to human shape. “Oh! how I long to call thee mine—to know that thou art indissolubly linked to me! But say—tell me—when shall this happy, happy union take place?—when wilt thou accompany me to the altar?”

“Let us depart for England without delay, my dearest Lorenzo,” murmured Laura, lavishing upon him the most tender caresses; “and there—in London—our marriage can be celebrated immediately after our arrival. Have you any tie—and business on hand to retain you in Paris?”

“None in the world,” was the answer: “any even if I had, everything should give place to the accomplishment of my felicity and the fulfilment of your wishes.”

“Then let us take our departure as early as convenient to-morrow morning,” said Laura.

“And we shall not separate in the meantime?” observed the young Count, straining the syren to his breast.

She murmured a favourable reply; and, after some minutes of tender dalliance, she hastened to give her servants the necessary instructions relative to the preparations for her departure.

A delicate supper was then served up; and the sparkling champagne made the eyes of the lovers flash more brightly, and enhanced the rich carnation glow of their countenances.

The time-piece struck eleven; and they were about to retire to rest, when Rosalie hastily entered the room, and approaching Laura, said in an under tone, "*Mademoiselle*, your mother has this moment arrived. I told her that you were engaged—and she awaits your presence in the breakfast-parlour."

"It is my mother, dear Lorenzo," Laura observed to the Count, who had not overheard the abigail's communication: "but her arrival will not in any way interfere with our arrangements," she hastened to add, perceiving that the young nobleman's countenance suddenly expressed apprehension.

"And yet you yourself appear to be but little pleased at this occurrence, dearest Laura," he whispered, gazing fondly upon her.

"I could have wished it were otherwise," she responded: "but no matter. There is nothing to fear: I am independent of my mother. Have patience for ten minutes—and I will return to you."

With these words, she pressed his hand tenderly, and then hurried from the apartment—the discreet Rosalie having already retired the moment she had delivered her message.

Laura hastened to the breakfast-parlour; and there she found her mother, whose garments indicated that she had just arrived in Paris after a journey in an open vehicle and on a dusty road.

CHAPTER CLXXXIV.

LAURA AND HER MOTHER.—ANOTHER INTERRUPTION.

"HERE I am in Paris once more, Perdita—Laura, I mean," said the old woman, without moving from the seat which she had taken, and without offering to embrace her daughter; "and I am within the fortnight stipulated, too."

"You have travelled post from Calais or Boulogne, doubtless?" observed Laura, interrogatively: "for your clothes are covered with dust—and it is evident that you were not cooped up in the interior of a diligence. I may therefore conclude that you were successful in your search after Torrens and your designs upon him," she added, fixing a penetrating glance upon her mother's countenance.

"I was so far successful that I obtained certain intelligence concerning him," responded the old woman: "but I failed altogether in my hope of becoming the possessor of his money."

"And what was the intelligence to which you allude?" demanded Laura, who felt convinced from her mother's manner that she had not failed in the object of her journey.

"I learnt, beyond all question or doubt, that Torrens really was the murderer of Percival, but that he himself had met with a violent death."

"Ah! Torrens is no more?" exclaimed Laura:

then, bending a look full of deep meaning upon her mother, she said in a tone of equal significance, "You went to London to be revenged upon him—and he is dead! He has experienced a violent end. Well—I understand you—I read your secret—and you need not be more explicit."

"By heaven! you wrong me, Laura," exclaimed the old woman, starting in astonishment and alarm as the justice of her daughter's horrible suspicion became suddenly apparent—a suspicion that she herself had so incautiously engendered by the mysterious manner in which she had announced Torrens' death.

"It is not worth while disputing upon the subject," said Laura, in a tone which convinced her mother—and, indeed, was intended to convince her, that no explanation could now possibly wipe away the suspicion alluded to. "You are doubtless well pleased that Torrens is no more—and that is sufficient."

"Perdita—Laura, I mean," said the old woman, speaking as if her tongue were parched, or as if ashes clogged up her throat, "why should you take a delight in uttering things to vex and annoy me? For some time past—indeed ever since the date of your connection with Charles Hatfield, a barrier has appeared to rise up between us. We seem to act towards each other as if it were tacitly understood that we are enemies, or that we mutually harboured distrust and suspicion."

"I am aware of it, mother—and it is all your own fault," answered Laura. "You sought to exercise over me a sway to which I would not and never will submit; and you menaced me in a manner not easily to be forgotten."

"But you had your revenge—for you abused me vilely," retorted Mrs. Mortimer, with a malignant bitterness of accent.

"Acknowledged! And you yourself must admit that you provoked my resentment. But let us not remain here bandying words, which may only lead to an useless quarrel. Circumstances have opened to me a grand career—a career, in which my happiness and my interests may be alike promoted; and I have accepted the destiny thus favourably prepared for me. In a word, I am about to marry a young Italian nobleman whom I feel I can love—whom I already love, indeed—and who possesses a proud title and princely revenues."

"Ah! you are about to be married?" said Mrs. Mortimer, speaking as if the project were perfectly natural and without an objection: but in her heart—in the depths of her foul and vindictive soul, she was rejoiced,—for this alliance would place her daughter completely in her power.

The reader will remember that the old woman was aware of Laura's union with Charles Hatfield, but that the young lady herself was totally unsuspecting of that fact being thus known to her mother.

"Yes," resumed Laura: "I am about to be married. I leave Paris for England to-morrow morning. I return to London, because I am now independent of the Hatfields; and at my leisure I shall devise means to avenge myself for the insults I have received at their hands. It now remains for you and me to decide upon what terms we are to exist in future. Be friendly—and I shall allow you a handsome income: be hostile—and I shall dare all you can do against me."

"I am sorry that my daughter should think is

necessary to propose such alternatives," said Mrs. Mortimer. "State what you require me to do."

"To settle in France—wherever you please," responded Laura; "and I will grant you an allowance of two hundred pounds every three months."

"The pecuniary portion of the conditions is liberal enough," said Mrs. Mortimer; "but the rest is as despotic and galling as the terms which Mr. Hatfield made the other day with you."

"I much regret that prudence should compel me thus to dictate to you," returned Laura: "there is, however, no alternative. 'Tis for you to yield to my conditions—or open war will at once commence between us."

"I consent—I agree," said the old woman, who knew that the time was not yet come for her to show her teeth in defiance of her daughter.

"So much the better!" exclaimed Laura, but in a tone indicating that the matter was one of perfect indifference to her; for she little knew—little suspected how irretrievably her marriage with the Count of Carignano would place her in her mother's power. "And now I have one question to ask you."

"Speak, Perdita," observed the old woman.

"Pray remember that my name is *Laura*!" cried her daughter, petulantly. "You perceive how necessary it is that we should dwell apart from each other. Your imprudence is really great; and the question I am about to put to you, refers to some matter in which you doubtless compromised yourself. Are you acquainted with the Marquis of Delmour?"

"The Marquis of Delmour!" repeated Mrs. Mortimer, with an expression of countenance denoting the most unfeigned astonishment. "No—certainly not. I have heard of him, it is true; but only in the same way that one hears of any other person conspicuous for rank, wealth, or station. I have never seen the Marquis of Delmour to my knowledge."

"Perhaps you have been in his company without knowing who he was," resumed Laura. "At all events, have you recently represented yourself, in any circle or place, as the widow of a General-officer whom you stated to have died in India?"

The system of duplicity which the old woman determined to adopt towards her daughter, had so well prepared her to sustain any questioning or cross-examination on any point, that she did not betray the least surprise, nor did her countenance undergo the slightest change as that interrogatory suddenly brought to her mind the conviction that Mr. Vernon and the Marquis of Delmour must be one and the same person. Without at the moment perceiving how this discovery could be in any way useful to her, but still acting with that reserve and wariness with which she had armed herself in order to meet her daughter, she resolved not to mention a single word of anything that had occurred in London relative to the beautiful Recluse of the Cottage, her father, and Lord William Trevelyan.

Accordingly, and without the least hesitation,—nor quailing, nor changing colour beneath the penetrating gaze which Laura fixed upon her,—she said, "I do not remember ever to have made any such representation as that to which you allude."

"It is singular—this coincidence," mused Laura, audibly; "and yet it is of little import to me."

"It would appear, at all events, that you must be

acquainted with this Marquis of Delmour of whom you speak?" said Mrs. Mortimer, in a careless and indifferent tone.

Scarcely were the words uttered, when a violent ringing at the front door was heard; and in a few moments a voice, instantly recognised alike by Laura and her mother, exclaimed to Rosalie, "Has your mistress retired to rest yet? I must see her immediately."

The abigail, suspecting that it would be better not to allow the Marquis of Delmour—for he the visitor was—to be brought face to face with the handsome young Italian, unhesitatingly conducted the nobleman into the parlour where Laura and Mrs. Mortimer were holding their interview.

But the moment Rosalie had closed the door behind the Marquis, he uttered an ejaculation of mingled astonishment and rage, and springing towards Mrs. Mortimer, exclaimed, "Ah! I meet you again, vile woman! Give me up my daughter—tell me where you have hidden her!"

And he caught her violently by the arm.

"I know what you mean, my lord," said the old woman, hastily: "but you accuse me wrongfully."

"Wrongfully!" repeated the Marquis, his countenance white with rage: "no—no! I only accuse you justly—for it must be you who have spirited away my child—my beloved Agnes!"

"It is false!" ejaculated the old woman, with an emphasis which made him release his hold of her and fall back two or three paces.

"False, you say!" he cried. "Oh! then, if you have really not done this flagrant wrong—but if you are in possession of any clue—"

"I am—I am," interrupted Mrs. Mortimer, seeing in a moment that a reward was to be obtained and her spite against Lord William Trevelyan to be gratified at the same time: for she *did* cherish the bitterest animosity against that young nobleman, on account of his conduct towards her when, four days previously, she had taken Agnes Vernon to his house in Park Square.

"And yet I cannot conceive you to be innocent in this matter," exclaimed the nobleman, surveying her with deep distrust and aversion—and all this time taking no notice of Laura, so profoundly were his feelings engrossed by the subject which now occupied his mind: "for wherefore did you visit the cottage where Agnes dwelt?—why did you intrude yourself upon her presence?"

"All that can be readily explained, my lord," responded Mrs. Mortimer, not losing an atom of her self-possession.

"Then tell me where my daughter is—tell me what has become of her?" cried the nobleman, in an appealing tone; "and if you have been concerned in removing her from the cottage, I will forgive you! Nay, more—I will reward you handsomely."

"Your daughter is in safety—that much I can inform you at once," said Mrs. Mortimer.

"Thanks—thanks for this assurance!" cried the old nobleman, clasping his hands together in gratitude for the relief thus imparted to his mind: then, suddenly recollecting the presence of Laura, he turned towards her, and in a tone of mingled suspicion and reproach, said, "But how is it that I find you with the very person of whom I spoke to you somewhat disparagingly two short hours ago?"

"She claims some distant relationship with me, my dear Marquis," Laura hastened to observe—but

without manifesting the slightest embarrassment; while the rapid and intelligent sign which she made to her mother, and which was altogether unperceived by the nobleman, was fully understood by the old woman.

"Ah! that is on account of her name being *Mortimer*," said the Marquis, completely satisfied by the answer which Laura had given him—especially as the old woman offered no contradiction. "And now I must request you to accede to some alteration in our plans for to-morrow," he continued, drawing Laura aside, and speaking to her in a low tone. "On my return just now to the hotel where I am staying, I found a letter containing the afflicting intelligence that a daughter of mine—a daughter whom circumstances have compelled me to keep in the strictest seclusion—had suddenly and most mysteriously disappeared from her dwelling in the neighbourhood of London. This happened five days ago;—but Mrs. Gifford—my dear child's housekeeper, and I may almost say *guardian*—did not immediately write to me, hoping that Agnes would return. Oh! you may conceive how deeply this event has grieved me——"

"I sympathise sincerely with you, my dear Marquis," interrupted Laura, affecting to wipe away tears from her eyes: for it suited her purpose to remain on good terms with the old nobleman until she should have cashed her draft for the sixty thousand pounds. "Yes—I sincerely sympathise with you," she repeated: "and I can anticipate the proposed alterations in our arrangements. You intend to start immediately for England——"

"Without a moment's unnecessary delay," said the Marquis, who was greatly excited by the intelligence he had received from Mrs. Gifford: "the instant I return to my hotel, a post-chaise and four will be in readiness for me. But may I hope that you will follow me to London as speedily as convenient?"

"I shall depart to-morrow, my dear Marquis, at the hour already arranged," responded Laura; "and deeply do I regret that my preparations are so backward as to render it impossible for me to offer to become your travelling-companion at once."

"Dearest Laura!" murmured the Marquis, for a single moment losing the remembrance of his affliction in the doting passion he had formed for the beautiful woman who was thus grossly deluding him. "Our separation will not be very long," he continued; "and I hope that when we meet in London three days hence, I may have good news to tell you respecting Agnes. Now, madam," he exclaimed aloud, turning towards Mrs. Mortimer, who, while affecting to be examining the mantel-ornaments, was vainly endeavouring to catch the sense of what was passing at a little distance between her daughter and the Marquis;—"now, madam," he said, approaching her with an abruptness that made her start, "I do not think I shall be insulting you if I offer you a hundred guineas for the information which you professed yourself able and willing to give relative to my daughter—my dear and well-beloved Agnes."

"A hundred guineas, my lord!" exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer, contemptuously: "if you really love that young lady whom you call your daughter, you must surely consider that it is worth five or six times the amount named in order to regain possession of her."

"Laura dearest— I mean, Miss Mortimer," said

the nobleman, impatiently, as he turned towards the young lady,—"*oblige me with writing materials, and I will speedily satisfy this woman's rapacity.*"

"Perhaps I might also exact a recompense for keeping secret the good understanding which exists between your lordship and '*dearest Laura*,' and which you so unguardedly betrayed?" observed Mrs. Mortimer, in a tone of bitter sarcasm, and with a malignant glance darted from her snake-like eyes at her daughter.

"Silence, woman!" ejaculated the Marquis, speaking with the emphasis of authority: then, the writing materials being now placed before him, he sat down and wrote a cheque, which he tossed across the table to Mrs. Mortimer, saying, "I am sorry that I have not enough money about my person to satisfy your demands. I am therefore compelled to give you a draft upon my London bankers; and you will perceive that it is for *six times* as much as I at first offered you," he added, dwelling on the words which the old woman had herself used to indicate the amount of her expectations.

"Yes—my lord: I see that it is for six hundred pounds," she observed, coolly and quietly, as she folded up the cheque and secured it about her person. "And now I will tell you what I know concerning your daughter; and I take heaven to witness that I will not mislead you."

"If you do, my good woman," interrupted the Marquis, "you will find payment of the cheque stopped at the bank. Go on; and delay not—for my time is precious."

"In a word, my lord," said Mrs. Mortimer, the contemptuous manner in which she was treated by the haughty peer being fully counterbalanced by the handsome bonus that had just fallen into her hand,—"*Lord William Trevelyan*, whom you doubtless know well by name, if not personally, is deeply enamoured of your daughter; and he employed me to take a letter to her. I acquitted myself of the task: but Miss Agnes is a perfect dragon of virtue—and I could make little impression upon her."

"God be thanked!" ejaculated the Marquis, fervently.

"Well—although Lord William's passion is honourable enough, I have no doubt, yet Miss Agnes——"

"And is it Lord William who has taken her away?" demanded the Marquis, unable to restrain his impatience or any longer endure the tortures of suspense.

"No, my lord—it was her mother!" said Mrs. Mortimer, watching through profound curiosity the effect which this announcement would produce upon the nobleman.

"Ah! then my worst apprehensions are confirmed!" he exclaimed, in a tone of poignant anguish.

"But do not give way to despair, my lord," said Mrs. Mortimer: "for Miss Agnes subsequently escaped from the house where her mother placed her——"

"Oh! then she loves me still—*me*—her father!" exclaimed the Marquis, in accents of joy: "and she yielded not to the wiles of that woman—But proceed, madam—proceed!" he cried, suddenly interrupting himself, and again speaking in a tone of impatience.

"Having escaped, as I have just said," resumed Mrs. Mortimer, "Agnes fell into the power of a

man, from whose hands I was fortunate enough to rescue her; and, not knowing precisely whither to take her, I thought it best to consult Lord William Trevelyan upon the proper course to adopt. His lordship, who is a man of honour—and pray remember to tell him that I say so,” she added, with a slight accent of malignity,—“his lordship immediately placed her in the care of a lady of his acquaintance; and it is to him that you must apply, my Lord Marquis, for the address of your daughter’s new abode.”

“And all that you have told me is true?” exclaimed the old nobleman.

“If it should prove otherwise, your lordship has in your own hands the means of punishing me,” responded Mrs. Mortimer.

“True!” cried the Marquis; “and now I am somewhat consoled by the tidings you have given me. My daughter is safe, and in the society of honourable persons. I thank you, madam.”

He then turned away to shake Laura cordially by the hand ere he took his departure.

“You will leave to-morrow at mid-day, dearest,” he said, in an under tone to her whom he fondly hoped to make his mistress, but who was so grossly deluding him.

“Yes—without fail,” was the reply.

“And on your arrival in town you will instantly send me word at which hotel you take up your temporary residence?” continued the Marquis. “I shall hasten to join you, and hope to have a charming villa ready to receive you.”

“You are too good, my dear Marquis, to think so much of me at a time when your heart is so severely lacerated on account of your daughter,” said Laura, likewise speaking in a whisper.

“There is nothing that I would not do for you, beloved Laura,” responded the infatuated old noble. “You hold already a cheque for sixty thousand pounds: that is nothing to what I will do for you, my dearest angel. And if I allude to pecuniary affairs at all, it is to convince you how anxious I am to ensure your happiness, not only now—but likewise when I shall be no more.”

Thus speaking, the Marquis of Delmour pressed Laura’s hand fervently, and was about to hurry away, when, suddenly recollecting something, he drew her still farther aside, and said in a very low whisper, “I have nothing to do with that woman, dearest! I dislike her looks—I mistrust her altogether. She is evidently an adventuress. Oh! how could I have ever supposed even for an instant that such a wretch was the mother of such an angelic being as my Laura?”

Another fond and impassioned look—another pressure of the hand—and the Marquis was gone.

Of all this latter dialogue which took place between that nobleman and Laura, and which was carried on in a very low tone, Mrs. Mortimer, who strained all her auricular faculties to catch even a syllable, succeeded only in overhearing a very short sentence. But that one sentence she did manage to catch; and a highly significant as well as deeply important one was it for her.

And these were the words which she thus caught:—“*You hold already a cheque for sixty thousand pounds!*”

Quickly as the first glass of sparkling wine infuses a delicious sensation throughout the entire frame,—so speedily did that one sentence create a burning joy in the breast of the old woman. She

saw through it all:—Laura had wheedled the Marquis out of that immense sum—and now she intended to jilt him, and espouse the Italian noble!

“A cheque for sixty thousand pounds!” thought Mrs. Mortimer within herself, while the Marquis and Laura were still whispering together: “sixty thousand pounds! Well—we shall see! It is better than a paltry six hundred.”

And, while thus musing, she affected to be smelling the flowers on the mantel-piece, until the door suddenly opened and closed again instantaneously—and then she turned round towards Laura, for the Marquis was gone.

“And you assured me that you knew nothing of the nobleman who has just left us?” said Laura, fixing her eyes with cold contempt on her mother.

“I knew him only as Mr. Vernon until I saw him here this evening,” was the answer.

“But it was to him that you had passed yourself as the widow of a General-officer in the Indian army,” persisted Laura: “and yet you denied having ever made such a representation to any one. You perceive, mother, that I cannot trust you: you are full of duplicity and deceit even to me—and still you complain that a coolness subsists between us.”

“I may observe, on my side, Laura,” retorted the old woman, with a subdued and cunning malignity, “that you were not more communicative to me relative to the Marquis of Delmour than I was disposed to be to you. We are therefore even upon that score; and, at all events, let us not dispute. I shall now leave you, Laura—for I am well aware that my room will be preferable to my company. It is my present intention to remain in Paris; and from time to time I will send you tidings of my whereabouts, so that you may duly remit me my quarterly income, as promised just now. The cheque of the Marquis I shall send through the medium of some Parisian banker.”

The old woman then took her departure, a cool “Good-bye” being all the farewell salutation that passed between her daughter and herself as she crossed the threshold of the handsome suite of apartments.

“Thank God! she is gone!” thought Laura, as she hastened to rejoin her handsome Castalcian, who was growing impatient of her protracted absence.

“The haughty and self-sufficient creature!” murmured Mrs. Mortimer to herself, as she hastily descended the stairs: “she is completely in my power—at my mercy—in every way!”

And did the old woman remain in Paris in fulfilment of her declared intention?

No:—wearied and exhausted by travel as she already was, but animated with an indomitable energy, Mrs. Mortimer hastened, late though the hour now was, to procure a post-chaise and four; and while Laura was passing a night of voluptuousness and love in the arms of the handsome Count of Carignano, her mother was speeding along the road to Boulogne, on her way back to London.

CHAPTER CLXXXV.

THE LAWYER’S HEAD CLERK.

IT was about four o’clock in the afternoon of the day following the incidents just related, that Mr. James Heathcote, the lawyer was seated at his

writing-table in that private office which we have already described to our readers,—when a low, timid knock at the door fell upon his ears.

"Come in," he exclaimed, in his short, abrupt, and almost brutal manner, well knowing that the individual about to enter was the poor wretch whom he bullied when in an ill-humour, and whom on all occasions he was wont to make his vile agent and spaniel-like slave.

Creeping up as usual—rather than walking with the natural dignity of a man—towards the table, Mr. Green bowed humbly and waited until his dreaded, but also hated master should deign to give him leave to speak.

"Well, Mr. Green," said Heathcote, after a pause of a few minutes, during which he waited to see whether his grovelling serf would dare to open his lips until he received permission,—for the lawyer was a man who liked to ascertain the full extent of the power that he wielded over his subordinates, and also to make *them* feel that he *did* exercise that power;—"well, Mr. Green, what news this afternoon?"

And, throwing himself back in his arm-chair, he passed his thin, yellow hand through his iron-grey hair.

"If you please, sir, I have several things to report, as you were so much engaged this morning that you could not give the time to hear me," observed Green, in that subdued and almost affrighted tone of voice which years of servility had rendered habitual to him;—for such is ever the case with those who mistake the most abasing sycophancy for proofs of respect. And here we may observe that it is only in the demoralising and degrading influence of Royal Courts that this disgusting usurpation is adopted as a species of homage to the divinity raised up by man's stupid and most reprehensible idolatry.

"Ah! I recollect—I was busy this morning," exclaimed Mr. Heathcote. "Well—what have you to report?"

"Please, sir," resumed the trembling clerk, "Gregson the upholsterer has put his affairs into the hands of Goodman and Meanwell, who have got all his creditors save yourself, sir, to sign a letter of license; and Mr. Goodman has been here this afternoon to say that unless you will give your name also, his client must inevitably go into the *Gazette*."

"Then let him go—and to the devil also, if he chooses!" vociferated Mr. Heathcote, flying into a passion—a most unusual thing with one so cool, calculating, and self-possessed as he. "Goodman and Meanwell are what are called *honest attorneys*—conscientious lawyers—straightforward practitioners;—and they will exert all their energies to carry their client through his difficulties. But I will thwart them, Mr. Green—by God! I will thwart them; Gregson *shall* go into the *Gazette*—even if I lose every penny he owes me. I *hate* your honest attorneys;—and his lips were curled in bitter irony and demoniac malignity. "Go on, sir!" he exclaimed savagely, as if it were his wretched clerk who had irritated him.

"Thompson, sir—the defendant in Jones's case, you know," resumed Mr. Green, was arrested yesterday—in pursuance of your orders, sir. I took the liberty of mentioning, sir, that his wife had just been confined—"

"Well?" exclaimed Mr. Heathcote, impatiently.

"And that his eldest child was at the point of death, sir," added Green, more timidly than before.

"Well—what next?" demanded the attorney.

"The poor child has since died, sir."

"The poor child, indeed! Who cares a fig about a child? Why—you are growing quite soft-hearted, Mr. Green," said Heathcote, in a tone of cutting irony. "The *poor* child, indeed! I suppose the wife has died also?" he added, with heartless jocularity.

"Indeed, sir, I am sorry to say you are right in your conjecture," responded Green, scarcely venturing to make the announcement.

"No!—is it really the case, though?" exclaimed Heathcote, startled for a moment at finding that what he had said as a brutal jest turned out to be a solemn and shocking truth. "Well—what next?" he demanded, mastering those emotions which he was ashamed at having betrayed.

"Thompson himself, sir—driven to despair by these numerous afflictions—cut his throat in prison this afternoon," added Mr. Green.

"Is this possible?" cried Mr. Heathcote, again excited to a degree more powerful than the clerk had ever before observed: but speedily subduing his feelings, by dint of a strong and almost superhuman effort—so sudden and effective was it—he said, "Well—it is not my fault. Maudlin sentimentalists will perhaps lay his death at my door—"

"I am afraid, sir, that *all* the three deaths will be attributed to you," interrupted Green, with an affectation of exceeding meekness, while from beneath his brows he darted a rapid glance of fiend-like expression at his master—a glance which denoted how the man in his secret soul feasted upon the pangs which now rent the heart of the attorney.

"I am tough enough to bear everything that people may say of me, Mr. Green," observed Heathcote, in his usually cold tone of irony. "But proceed with your communications."

"Beale's wife, sir, called this morning—you know Beale?—the man you put into Whitecross Street prison, and whose wife and children have been starving ever since—"

"Really, Mr. Green," interrupted Heathcote, fixing a stern look upon his clerk, "it would appear that you are purposely entering into minute details this afternoon in order to annoy me. Of course I know who Beale is—"

"Was, sir, if you please," said Green, with difficulty concealing the savage delight that he took in thus torturing—or, at least, endeavouring to torture, his master.

"What do you mean, sir?" demanded Heathcote, savagely.

"That Beale died in the infirmary at Whitecross Street last night, sir," responded Green, his tone and manner becoming more abjectly obsequious in proportion as his internal joy augmented at the increasing excitement and irritation of his master.

"The man was doubtless a drunkard, Green," observed Heathcote, roughly: "and therefore, when no longer able to get liquor, the reaction carried him off."

"I dare say, sir, that you know best—and I am sure you must be right," returned the clerk, with



a low bow: "but the man's friends *do* say that a more sober, hard-working, and deserving fellow did not exist."

"And therefore I suppose that *his* death will be laid at my door!" exclaimed Heathcote, now for the first time in his life glancing timidly—almost appealingly, at his clerk, as if to implore him to devise some excuse or start some palliation that might ease his troubled conscience.

But Green, whose very obsequiousness and servility afforded him the means of venting his spite on his hated master, pretended to take the observation as an assertion and not an interrogatory, and replied in a humble tone, "Your foresight and knowledge of the world, sir, are beyond all dispute; and, as you say, Beale's death is certain to be laid at your door. But of course you are perfectly indifferent to the tittle-tattle of scandalous tongues."

Heathcote rose from his seat—or rather started from it, and walked rapidly up and down the room thrice. He felt sorely troubled; for, hardened as his heart was—obdurate as his soul had become, he could not shut out the whispering voice of conscience which now proclaimed him to be the author

of all the deaths that his clerk had enumerated. And, while he was racked by these painful convictions, the thought suddenly flashed to his brain that Green had displayed a savage delight in detailing those horrors; and, man of the world as James Heathcote was, it occurred to him, as a natural sequence to the suspicion just mentioned, that his clerk hated and abhorred him.

Acting under the influence of these impressions, he stopped suddenly short close by the spot where Green was standing; and he fixed his snake-like gaze upon the shabbily-dressed, servile-looking, self-debasing individual, who appeared to be maintaining his eyes bent timidly and reverentially on the floor—as if his master's emotions were something too sacred to look upon.

"Green!—Mr. Green!" exclaimed Heathcote, laying his hand with such abruptness and also with such violence upon the grovelling wretch's shoulder, that it made him start convulsively—though he knew all the while that his master had accosted him, and was also gazing on him.

"Yes, sir!" cried the clerk, raising his eyes diffidently towards Heathcote's countenance.

"Do you conceive that the deaths of those people can be righteously attributed to me?" demanded the lawyer, speaking in a low, measured, and solemn tone, and looking as if he sought to read into the most secret depths of his clerk's soul: "do you, I say, dare to associate any act or deed of mine with *their* fate?" he asked, raising his voice, while his face became terrible to gaze upon.

"Who?—I, sir?" ejaculated Green, as if in astonishment at the questions put to him; and his own countenance assumed such a sinister aspect that Heathcote surveyed him with increasing suspicion and distrust.

"Yes—you!" cried the lawyer, ferociously. "Now, mark me, Green," he continued, in a lower and more composed tone of voice,—“if you dare to harbour ill feelings towards me—if even a scintillation of such feelings should transpire from your words or manner, I will crush you as I would a worm—I will send you to Newgate—abandon you to your fate—and, if necessary, *help* to have you shipped for eternal exile."

"My God! how have I deserved these implied reproaches—these terrible menaces?" demanded Green, his countenance expressing real alarm, and his whole frame shivering from head to heel.

"Perhaps you have *not* deserved them—and in that case they will serve as a warning," said Heathcote, now becoming suddenly calm and imperiously scornful: "but I think that you *did* merit all I have uttered—and now you know me better, perhaps, than you knew me before. However, let all this pass. I do not for an instant suppose that I possess your affection; but I will guard against the effects of your hate. Answer me not, sir: you cannot wipe away the impressions which this afternoon's scene has conjured up in my mind. And now proceed with anything more that you may have to tell me."

"Fox, the ironmonger, sir," resumed Green, in a more timid and servile tone than ever, and with a manner so cowed and grovelling that it completely veiled the strong pantings for revenge and the emotions of bitter, burning hate which dwelt in the clerk's secret soul,—“Fox, the ironmonger, sir, has realised all his property and absconded."

"Did I not tell you to issue execution against his goods without delay?" demanded Heathcote, angrily.

"I obeyed your commands, sir, as soon as the usual forms were gone through," responded Green: "but in the interval the man, knowing the steps you were taking against him, sold off everything and ran away—no one can tell whither."

"Then all your intelligence is evil this afternoon, Mr. Green?" said Heathcote. "What about Mrs. Sefton?"

"The spy that I set to watch her has reported her removal from Kentish Town to a house at Bayswater, sir," answered Green; "and as she has a young lady with her—a Miss Vernon, it appears—she does not seem to be busying herself in any way that might interfere with your interests."

"But that insolent young nobleman—that Lord William Trevelyan?" demanded Heathcote.

"I do not think he is troubling himself any more in the business, sir," answered Green.

"Good and well!" ejaculated the attorney. "These latter tidings constitute something like an agreeable set-off in respect to all your former communications. Hah!" he cried, suddenly inter-

rupting himself, as the clock proclaimed the hour: "five already! Well, you may go now, Green—and see that your spies keep a good look-out upon the movements of Mrs. Sefton and Lord William Trevelyan."

"I will, sir," was the reply; and the clerk bowed himself out of the office.

Half an hour afterwards Mr. Green was wending his way towards the aristocratic quarters of the West End; and at length he entered a respectable-looking public-house in the neighbourhood of Portland Place.

Having called for some refreshment, he took up the newspaper to while away the time until the arrival of the person whom he was expecting: but he could not settle his thoughts to the perusal of the journal. He read an article through, from beginning to end; and, when he reached the termination, he had not retained a single idea of the subject.

The fact was that the man's mind was excited and bewildered by the scene which had taken place that afternoon with his master. He felt that he had been trampled upon—treated with every possible indignity—despised, menaced, and almost spit upon;—and he was compelled to suffer all—to bear everything—to endure these flagrant wrongs, without daring to murmur.

"But I will be avenged—terribly avenged!" thought he within himself, as he bent over the table in the public-house parlour, supporting his head upon his two hands: "yes—even though I should sacrifice myself, I will be avenged sooner or later. For years and years have I been his slave—his menial—his instrument—his tool;—and he has kept me in such utter subjection that it was not until lately I remembered that I really possessed a soul and a spirit of my own. The hard-hearted—cruel—remorseless wretch! I hate and abhor him with a malignant hatred and a savage abhorrence. No words are strong enough—no terms sufficiently potent to convey even to myself an idea of the magnitude of that aversion which I now entertain for him. But if he has me in his power in one way, he is at my mercy in many other others. He little suspects how deep an insight I possess into his affairs—his machinations—his dark plots. He thinks that I behold but the surface: he knows not that I have fathomed to the bottom!"

At this point in the clerk's musings, the door of the parlour was opened, and a respectable-looking man, dressed in black, but with a white cravat, entered the room.

"You are somewhat behind your time, Mr. Fitzgeorge," said Green, as this individual—who was Lord William Trevelyan's valet—seated himself by the clerk's side.

"Only a few minutes," responded Fitzgeorge. "And now to business without delay. It is fortunate that we are all alone in this parlour at present: otherwise I should have proposed to adjourn to a private room. Have you thought well of the subject I mentioned to you yesterday?"

"I have," was the answer, delivered in a tone of decision: "and I am prepared to meet your wishes. But remember that I told you how completely I am in the power of the villain Heathcote; and if he were to discover that your noble master received his information through me—"

"He cannot possibly detect your instrumentality in the business, provided you do not betray yourself," said Fitzgeorge.

"Then I cannot hesitate to serve you," responded Green.

"Here are a hundred pounds in advance of the sum promised you," continued the valet, producing bank-notes to the amount named; "and the other moiety shall be paid the moment the information you are about to give me shall have proved to be correct."

"Ah! it is a long—long time since I could call so much money my own," said Green, with a deep sigh, as he gazed upon the notes—half doubting whether it were possible that they were about to find their way into his pocket.

"Take up the money and use despatch—for my time is precious," exclaimed Fitzgeorge.

The clerk followed the first suggestion with amazing alacrity; and his sinister countenance was now as radiant with joy as such a face could be.

"Your master is generous—very generous," he said, as soon as the notes were secured in his waistcoat-pocket; "and I will serve him to the utmost of my power. The mad-house to which Sir Gilbert Heathcote has been consigned, is kept by Dr. Swinton, and is situated in the neighbourhood of the new church facing the end of the Bethnal Green Road."

"I am well acquainted with the locality," said Fitzgeorge. "The church you speak of is in the Cambridge Road, and stands at one of the angles of the Green?"

"Precisely so," answered the clerk; "and the lunatic asylum looks upon the Green itself, its back windows commanding a view of Globe Town. But here is the exact address," continued the man, producing a card from his pocket.

"That is all I require," said Fitzgeorge. "Three days hence you can meet me here again; and if in the meantime I should have discovered that Sir Gilbert Heathcote is really confined in Dr. Swinton's asylum, the other hundred pounds shall be handed over to you."

The valet and the clerk then separated.

CHAPTER CLXXXVI.

DR. SWINTON.

THE mad-house kept by Dr. Swinton was a spacious building, with a large garden, surrounded by a high wall, at the back.

It was by no means a gloomy-looking place, although the casements were protected by iron bars; for to mitigate that prison-like effect, the curtains were of a cheerful colour, and the window-sills were adorned with flowers and verdant evergreens in bright red pots. Moreover, the front of the house was stuccoed; and wherever paint was used, the colours were of the gayest kind.

The front door always stood open during the day-time, because there was an inner door of great strength which led into the hall; and a porter in handsome livery was constantly lounging about at the entrance.

The Doctor himself was an elderly person, of highly respectable appearance, and of very pleasing manners when he chose to be agreeable: but no demon could exhibit greater ferocity than he, when compelled to exercise his authority in respect to those amongst his patients who had no friends to care about them.

It was between nine and ten o'clock in the evening of the day following the interview between Fitzgeorge and Heathcote's head clerk, that a plain carriage and pair drove up to the door of Doctor Swinton's establishment.

The porter immediately rushed forward to open the door and let down the steps of the vehicle; and two persons alighted.

One was a tall, handsome young man of genteel bearing, and handsomely dressed: the other was some years older, and might be described as respectable without having anything aristocratic in his appearance.

"Have the kindness to say that Mr. Smithson, accompanied by his friend Mr. Granby, requests an interview with your master," were the words immediately addressed to the porter by the elder of the two visitors, while the other appeared to be gazing about him in a vacant and stolid manner.

"Walk in, gentlemen," said the obsequious porter, with a low bow: he then rang a bell, and a footman in resplendent livery opened the inner door.

Mr. Granby and Mr. Smithson were now conducted through a spacious hall into an elegantly furnished parlour, lighted by a superb lustre suspended to the ceiling.

"The Doctor will be with you in a minute, gentlemen," said the domestic, who immediately retired to acquaint his master with their arrival: but the moment the door had closed behind him, a smile of deep meaning instantly appeared upon the lips of the visitors, as they exchanged equally significant looks.

In a few minutes Dr. Swinton appeared—his countenance wearing such a benignant expression that if the Saints at Exeter Hall could only have bribed him to attend on the platform at their May Meetings, they would have secured a sufficiency of outward appearance of philanthropy to draw gold from the purses of even the most cynical. In fact, the doctor was precisely the individual from whose lips might be expected a most touching and lachrymose speech upon the "benighted condition" of the heathen, and the absolute necessity of procuring funds for the purpose of circulating a million of Bibles amongst the poor savages of the Cannibal Islands.

His thin grey hair was combed with precision over his high and massive forehead: a smile played on his lips, showing his well-preserved teeth;—and his eyes beamed with mildness—almost with meekness, as if he had succeeded, by long perseverance, in resigning himself to a profession which militated sadly against a natural benevolence of heart.

He was dressed in deep black; his linen was of the finest material and of snowy whiteness;—he wore a low cravat; and his enormous shirt-frill was prevented from projecting too much by means of a diamond pin that could not have cost less than fifty guineas.

The middle finger of his right hand was adorned with a ring of equal value; and a massive chain with a bunch of gold seals depended from his fob.

We should have observed that the Doctor wore black silk stockings and shoes—it being evening; and we have every cause to believe that the reader may now form a tolerably accurate idea of that gentleman's personal appearance.

Leaning forward as he walked, and with a kind of mincing gait—half familiar, and half obsequious

—Dr. Swinton advanced towards the visitors, only one of whom rose at his approach;—and this was Mr. Smithson, the elder of the two. The other remained in an apparent state of apathetic laziness on the sofa, where he had taken his seat.

"Your most obedient, Mr. Smithson," said the Doctor, proffering his hand to the individual whom he thus addressed. "This is your friend Mr. Granby, I presume—the gentleman of whom you made mention when you honoured me with a visit this morning."

"Yes, Doctor—that is indeed my unfortunate friend Granby," responded Smithson, drawing the physician into the window-recess, and speaking in a whisper.

"He is a fine, handsome young man," observed the mad-doctor, glancing towards the subject of his remark, and likewise adopting a low tone. "What a pity it is!" he added, turning towards Mr. Smithson, and placing his fore-finger significantly to his forehead.

"A thousand—thousand pities, Doctor!" was the reply, delivered in a mournful voice. "Such a splendid intellect to be thus clouded!—such a genius to be thus crushed—annihilated!"

"No—do not anticipate such a calamity," hastily interposed the physician. "Rather let us hope that a judicious system—my system, Mr. Smithson—will eventually succeed in effecting a cure. But have you the regular certificates, my dear sir?—because you are well aware that a heavy responsibility rests upon gentlemen of my profession, who receive patients —"

"Everything is straightforward, Doctor," interrupted Mr. Smithson, producing two papers from his pocket. "These certificates are signed by medical men of eminence, and whose honour is unimpeachable."

"Oh! assuredly," exclaimed Swinton, glancing over the documents: "Dr. Prince is an ornament to the profession—and Mr. Spicer is equally well known. I have not the pleasure of their personal acquaintance—but I am no stranger to their high reputation and rigid integrity. So far, so good, my dear sir," continued the mad-doctor, restoring the certificates to Smithson. "And now, I think, we have little more to say in respect to arrangements—"

"Nothing that I am aware of," interrupted Mr. Smithson. "When I saw you this morning, you told me that your usual terms for first-class patients were six hundred a-year—"

"Each quarter payable in advance, you will please to recollect, my dear sir," said the physician, in a tone of bland insinuation. "It is a mere matter of form, you know—just the bare trouble of writing a cheque at the beginning instead of the close of the three months —"

"Oh! pray offer no apology for such an excellent regulation," interrupted Smithson: "short accounts make long friends."

"Ah! ah! very good—very good indeed!" said the Doctor, with a jocular cachinnation. "You are quite right, my dear sir—quite right. Shall I give you a stamped receipt?" he asked, as Smithson placed in his hands two bank notes—one for a hundred and the other for fifty pounds.

"You can send me the acknowledgment at your leisure," answered Smithson. "And now, as I must take my leave, permit me to beseech you to bestow all possible attention upon my unhappy

friend, and to spare no expense in rendering him as comfortable as possible. His relations, who have empowered me thus to place him in your establishment, are very wealthy, and will cheerfully augment the allowance, if required. No coercion is necessary with him: he is very tractable and by no means dangerous. At the same time, any thing resembling restraint would only induce him to move heaven and earth to escape. He cannot even endure to have his chamber-door locked at night; and you may safely trust him with a candle. Indeed, he *will* have a light. As for placing a keeper in his room, such a step would be as unwise as it is uncalled for. But I need not attempt to counsel a gentleman of your great experience and well-known skill! —"

"Pardon me, my dear sir," interrupted Dr. Swinton, drawing himself up at the compliment thus paid to his professional ability;—"but I am always delighted to receive any hints which the friends of my patients are kind enough to give me; and I can assure you that your suggestions shall be fully borne in mind. Of course you will call upon Mr. Granby occasionally?" asked the Doctor, in a tone which was as much as to imply that the less frequent such visits were, the better he thought it would be.

"Yes—I shall call now and then," responded Smithson, catching the physician's meaning in a moment: "but not too often—as the visits of friends are likely, no doubt, to produce an injurious effect on those minds which, under the influence of your admirable system, are becoming settled and tranquil. It is however my intention to return in a few days, just to assure myself that Granby is comfortable, and likewise that you are not displeased with your patient."

"Very good," said the Doctor; "I shall be delighted to see you. But will you not remain and partake of supper with us? You will then have an opportunity of judging how I treat my patients—for we all sit down to table together,—at least, those who belong to the first class, and who may be termed the parlour boarders. Besides, I forgot to mention to you this morning that the religious principles of my patients are not neglected, and that I keep a regular chaplain in the establishment. If you will stay to supper, you will have the pleasure of hearing him say grace before meat, and deliver a most soul-refreshing exhortation afterwards. Indeed, I may consider myself highly fortunate in having secured the spiritual services and the constant companionship of such a worthy man as the Reverend Mr. Sheepshanks."

"I should be much gratified by remaining to partake of your hospitality," answered Smithson,— "and even still more rejoiced to form the acquaintance of such an estimable character as Mr. Sheepshanks; but, unfortunately, my time is precious—and I must depart at once."

With these words Smithson turned away from the window; and approaching Mr. Granby, who was lounging upon the sofa, seemingly gazing on vacancy, he touched him on the shoulder, saying, "Good bye, my dear friend: you are going to stay here for a few days with Dr. Swinton—and you will find yourself very comfortable."

"I am already very comfortable," observed Granby, beginning to play with his fingers in a stolid, silly manner. "Can you talk with the hands, Smithson?"

"Oh! yes—and I will come to-morrow and hold a conversation with you by that method," was the answer.

"Well—don't forget," said Granby; "and bring all my friends with you,—twenty—thirty—forty of them, if you like. I shall know how to entertain them."

"In that case I will bring them all, my dear fellow," returned Smithson: then, in a whisper to the Doctor, he observed, "You perceive how childish he is—but perfectly harmless."

"Ah! I begin to fear with you that his cure will be no easy nor speedily-accomplished matter," responded the physician, also in a low tone.

"But you will do your best, Doctor, I know," said Smithson: then, turning once more to his friend, he exclaimed, "Good-bye, Granby—I am off."

"Well, go—I don't mean to accompany you," answered the patient, without moving from his recumbent position, and without even glancing towards Smithson; but maintaining his eyes fixed upon his fingers, with which he appeared to be practising the dumb alphabet. "Go along, I say—I am very comfortable where I am."

Mr. Smithson heaved a profound sigh, and, bidding the Doctor farewell, hurried to the carriage, with his cambric handkerchief to his eyes.

"Ah! he feels deeply for his afflicted friend," thought Dr. Swinton, as he remained for a few moments on the threshold of the front door, looking forth into the mild, clear, and beauteous night: "but I shall be the greatest fool in existence if ever I allow Mr. Granby to recover his reason. An annuity of six hundred pounds is not to be thrown away in a hurry. But I must prevent this fellow Smithson from calling more than once or twice a-year at the outside—and then only on stated days, or else with a week's notice. However, I shall get him here to supper in a short time, and will then cajole him into anything I propose. He is a soft-pated fool himself,—that I can see with half an eye."

Having arrived at this complimentary conclusion in respect to Mr. Smithson, the Doctor returned to the room where Mr. Granby was still lying upon the sofa, and still playing with his fingers.

CHAPTER CLXXXVII.

THE LUNATIC ASYLUM.

ALMOST immediately after the departure of Mr. Smithson, supper was served up in a spacious and handsomely-furnished apartment.

The table literally groined beneath the load of plate and China spread upon it: a splendid epergne, upon a large silver tray, occupied the middle of the board;—and numerous crystal decanters, containing choice wines of various sorts, sparkled in the flood of golden light poured forth from a magnificent lustre suspended to the ceiling.

Upwards of a dozen persons took their places at the table—all the first-class patients partaking of their meals in the delectable society of the Doctor.

That eminent individual seated himself at the head of the board; and our old friend, Mr. Sheepshanks, occupied the other extremity. The reverend gentleman, though now well stricken in years, was

so little altered since the reader last found himself in his company, that no minute description of his personal appearance is again necessary: suffice it to say, that his long, pale countenance was as sanctimoniously hypocritical as ever,—his hair, now quite grey, was combed with its wonted sleekness over his forehead,—and his speech was as drawling in tone and as full of cant in respect to language, as when we beheld him holding forth to the members of the South Sea Islands Bible Circulating Society, or figuring so ignominiously in the Insolvents' Court.

Mr. Granby, being a new-comer, was placed in the post of honour—namely, on the Doctor's right hand: but the unfortunate young gentleman did not appear to understand, much less appreciate the distinction—for he scarcely uttered a syllable, did but little justice to the succulent viands, and remained for the most part of the time gazing in listless vacancy straight before him.

We should however observe that, on first being introduced into the supper-room, he had darted a rapid and searching glance around,—embracing with that sweeping look the countenances of the dozen patients who were already assembled there: but immediately afterwards he resumed his stolid, meaningless expression, as if his mind were indeed a blank and mournful void.

"Now, Mr. Sheepshanks," said the Doctor, when all were duly seated at the table, "will you ask the usual blessing?"

"With your permission, most respected sir," replied the reverend gentleman: then, with a countenance as rueful as if he were about to go forth to the place of execution, he drawled out a lengthy grace in such a droning voice, that one of the lunatics fell fast asleep, and did not wake up again until the savoury odour of a plate of roast duck which was placed before him recalled to him his recollection and his supper.

"How do you find yourself this evening, Mr. Sheepshanks?" inquired Dr. Swinton, after having assured himself that all his guests were duly served. "You were complaining of a bilious attack this morning."

"Alas! yes, kind sir," responded the reverend gentleman, in a most doleful tone and with a profound sigh: "it pleased the Lord to ordain that the salmon of which I partook bountifully at yesterday's dinner should disagree with me—or peradventure it was the cucumber;—but, by the aid of the Divine blessing and the black draught, my dear patron, I have pretty well come round again. Nevertheless, I feel my appetite failing me."

And as he uttered these words, Mr. Sheepshanks helped himself to about a pound and a quarter of pigeon-pie—that being his second attack on the same dish.

"I shall be happy to assist you to some roast duck, Mr. Sheepshanks," said the Doctor, after a pause of about seven minutes.

"It would be an act of rudeness to decline an offer which bespeaks such delicate attentions on your part, worthy sir," returned the pious gentleman. "I have just managed to pick a morsel of this savoury pie; and I will endeavour to get through the wing of a duck, with heaven's assistance."

"So you shall," said the Doctor. "In the meantime I recommend you to take a little wine—for your stomach's sake."

"Ah! that was salutary advice which Paul gave to Timothy—*a little wine for the stomach's sake*," drawled out the excellent Mr. Sheepshanks;—and to prove that he really thought so, he filled a tumbler with claret and imbibed the delicious draught without a pause.

By this time a plate, containing the wing, leg, and part of the breast of a duck, was placed before him; and, with a hollow groan as if he thought he should never get through it all, he commenced the attack.

We may here observe that the Doctor, who was a widower, was fond of good living himself, and was well pleased when he found any one inclined to keep him company in the enjoyment of the pleasures of the table. For this reason he especially admired the Reverend Mr. Sheepshanks; and he well knew that when his chaplain pretended to have no appetite at all, he was in reality prepared to do ample justice to every dish. Hence the copious supply of duck which the physician had sent him; and that hospitable gentleman heard with secret pleasure the groan which Mr. Sheepshanks had given, and which was a sure indication that the modesty of the reverend glutton would be so far overcome as to induce him to allow the Doctor to help him again presently.

And here we may likewise remark that Swinton was no niggard of his good cheer. If he kept an excellent table, he liked to see justice done to the viands served up; and, as he received handsome remuneration from the friends of his first-class patients, he could well afford to regale them sumptuously, and amass a splendid fortune out of them into the bargain.

In conversation of the trivial kind of which we have just recorded a specimen, did the Doctor and Sheepshanks pass the time during supper,—the patients all maintaining a profound silence, and conducting themselves with the most perfect propriety. Indeed, were it not for a certain vacaney in the eyes of some, and a peculiar but inexplicable expression in the looks of the rest, it were impossible for a stranger to believe that there were any lunatics at all in the room.

After supper Mr. Sheepshanks delivered himself of a long prayer;—but as his libations had been somewhat copious, in spite of his bilious attack, his voice was occasionally so thick as to be unintelligible,—and it appeared as if he at times fancied himself to be an Irvingite speaking in the unknown tongues. Towards the conclusion of his oration, which very much resembled a funeral sermon in those parts where the meaning and sense could be caught, the reverend gentleman became so much affected that he began to weep; and had a maliciously-disposed person been present, he would have probably entertained the derogatory notion that Mr. Sheepshanks was in that maudlin condition vulgarly termed "crying drunk."

However, the affair passed off to the satisfaction of the worthy Doctor, who, as he thought of all that his chaplain had eaten and drunk during the evening, felt really proud of having beneath his roof a man of such splendid qualifications.

The after-supper oration being concluded, the keepers, all dressed in plain clothes, made their appearance to conduct the patients to their respective chambers; but as this was Granby's first night in the house, the Doctor volunteered to show him to the apartment prepared for his reception.

The new inmate of the asylum immediately obeyed the hint which the physician gave him relative to the hour for retiring; and he was forthwith escorted up a handsome staircase to a long corridor on the second floor. From this passage, which was carpeted, adorned with statues in recesses, and lighted by lamps hanging to the ceiling, opened several rooms, the doors of which were numbered.

At the entrance to the passage the Doctor pulled a wire which communicated with a bell on the storey overhead; and a matronly, respectable-looking woman made her appearance in answer to the summons.

"Which chamber is Mr. Granby to occupy, Mrs. Probert?" said the Doctor to his housekeeper—for such was the situation filled by the female.

"I have moved the gentleman—you know whom I mean, sir—that was in Number 7—"

"Ah! I understand," interrupted the physician, with some degree of impatience, as if he were afraid that his housekeeper was about to be more communicative than was necessary in the presence of the stranger. "Well—you have removed a certain person—"

"To Number 12, sir," replied Mrs. Probert; "and therefore Mr. Granby will please to occupy Number 7."

"Very good," said the Doctor. "Now, Mr. Granby, my dear friend—have the kindness to follow me."

The request was instantaneously obeyed; and the physician conducted his docile patient into the room that had been selected for him, and which was indeed the most spacious, airy, and elegantly-furnished bed-chamber in the whole establishment. It was usually appropriated to any new-comer of the first class whose friends appeared to take an interest in him; so that on the occasion of their first visit after his location in the asylum, the doctor might be enabled to show them, with pride, and even triumph, the magnificent apartment in which the patient was lodged. It was afterwards an easy matter to remove him to another and inferior, though still comfortable chamber—so as to make room for another arrival; and it was very seldom that a lunatic ever thought of mentioning to his friends, when they visited him again, the change of apartments that had taken place.

Having introduced Mr. Granby into the elegantly furnished chamber, the Doctor placed the candle upon the table, wished the young gentleman a good night's rest, and then retired—closing, but not locking, the door behind him.

The moment he had departed, a remarkable and signal change took place in the appearance and manner of Mr. Granby. His countenance lost its stolid vacaney of expression, and became animated with its natural intelligence; and, instead of seeming a dull, drivelling idiot, he stood erect—a fine, intrepid young man, conscious of the possession of superior mental faculties, and prepared to carry out effectually the scheme which had already been successfully commenced.

Indeed, all further mystery in this respect being unnecessary, we may as well at once declare that the fictitious Mr. Granby was the real Lord William Trevelyan—and that Smithson, who had so well performed the part of an afflicted and faithful friend, was none other than the astute valet, Fitz-george.

The young nobleman had made confidants of his

two friends, Dr. Prince and Mr. Spicer, who at his request had drawn up and signed the certificates necessary to procure his introduction into the abode of Dr. Swinton.

We must likewise here observe that when the short colloquy had occurred between the Doctor and his housekeeper, it instantly struck Trevelyan that allusion was made by them to Sir Gilbert Heathcote as being the individual whose sleeping-place had been changed from No. 7 to No. 12. He had noticed that the woman had observed a degree of mystery in referring, in the first instance, to the late occupant of the best bed-room—and that the Doctor, as if fearful that walls had ears, or that even a lunatic (such as he believed Trevelyan to be) might learn a dangerous secret, had hastily interposed to prevent Mrs. Probert from making a more direct allusion. All these circumstances induced Trevelyan to conjecture that the late occupant of his room was none other than Sir Gilbert; and, if this were the case, he had acquired the certainty that the baronet was the tenant of a neighbouring apartment in the same corridor.

It was now eleven o'clock; and the young nobleman resolved to wait until a much later hour ere he took any steps in pursuance of the clue which he believed himself to have gained relative to the chamber occupied by his persecuted friend.

He walked to the window, and looked forth through the iron bars, upon the mass of narrow lanes and squalid alleys constituting the suburb known as Globe Town, and all the features of which were brought vividly forward in the powerful moonlight,—for the atmosphere was as bright as if it were of transparent quicksilver.

But in a few minutes, Trevelyan grew wearied of the sameness of the prospect, so still and inanimate at that hour; and he began to examine, more minutely than at first, the chamber in which he found himself.

A massive wardrobe of dark mahogany, and elaborately carved, particularly attracted his notice; and, impelled by that curiosity which frequently seizes upon persons who seek to while away an hour or two by any means that opportunity or accident may afford, he opened the large and heavy doors. There were several shelves inside, filled with blankets and counterpanes, evidently deposited there during the summer-months, when the beds required less clothing than in winter.

Trevelyan was about to close the doors, when he suddenly caught sight of something that appeared to be a roll of papers thrust between the blankets. He drew forth the object of his attention, and found that his conjecture was correct; for he held in his hand a manuscript consisting of several folios of foolscap closely written upon in a genteel and fluent style.

A farther examination of the papers showed him, by means of certain dates, that the manuscript was only recently composed; and an indescribable feeling of interest, superior to any thing like vulgar curiosity, prompted him to read the documents that had thus strangely fallen into his possession.

Besides, he had determined to let a couple of hours slip away ere he took any step in pursuance of the design that had brought him to the mad-house; and he was by no means sorry at having discovered a mode of passing the interval otherwise than by restlessly pacing his chamber or gazing from the window.

He accordingly seated himself at the table and commenced the perusal of the extraordinary document that will be found in the ensuing chapter.

CHAPTER CLXXXVIII.

THE CONFESSIONS OF A LUNATIC.

"My blood has been boiling like a lava-stream. It appears to me as if I can now freely respire the fresh air, after having only breathed by gasps. What agony, then, has it been that has thus convulsed my soul?—of what kind was the anguish which has left such strange and unnatural sensations behind? Have I just awakened from a reverie of burning thoughts and appalling visions?—or was there any truth in the hideous things which seem to have passed like a frightful phantasmagoria through my brain? What means this suffocating sob that has struggled upward, and as it were spontaneously from my breast? O God! it appears to me now as if the wildest—most maniacal ideas have crowded into volumes, but become compressed into instants! Do I rave?—am I really here—in a room elegantly furnished—and seated at this table, writing? Is the bright sun-light streaming in at the open casement?—and does the breeze penetrate into the chamber, fanning my feverish cheek and throbbing brow, and wafting to me the delicious perfume of flowers? Is all this true—or a dream? Am I still a denizen of the earth,—that earth of which I seem for some time to have lost all forgetfulness—dwelling during the interval in a chaos peopled with horrible images—ghastly spectres—frightful beings of nondescript shape? Oh, I remember—I found this paper, this pen, and this ink in that large and massive ward-robe so exquisitely carved;—and something tells me that there are persons watching my movements—spying my actions—and who will be angry with me—perhaps ill-treat me—if they behold me writing down my ideas. Oh! I am afraid—I am afraid. My God! where am I? There is a hurry in my brain—my blood again begins to boil—my hand trembles as I write. But wherefore do I write at all? I know not:—and yet it seems to do me good!

"If any persons—any of those men whom I remember to have seen just now—should endeavour to enter the room, I will hide my papers in yonder ward-robe. Or else under the bed?—or between the mattresses? No: in that ward-robe—it is the safest place, I feel confident.

"But why should I not go forth and walk in that garden which I can see from the window?—or else penetrate into the fields at a great distance, and lie down and think? If the breeze coming into this room, does me good, how much more refreshed should I feel were I to ramble about in the open country! Yes—I will go.

"What does this mean? I have tried the door—and it is locked! Who dares to treat me thus—me—a gentleman of birth and fortune? I will not endure such conduct: I will appeal to my brother, the magistrate, for protection. He shall hang the wretches who have perpetrated this insolence.

"O God! what do I see? There are bars at the window! Great heavens! I shall go mad!

"MAD! Yes—that was the last word that I wrote yesterday—I suppose it must have been yesterday—when I so hastily concealed my papers, on hearing some one approach the door. I remember *that* full well! Yes—it was an elderly man, with a mild and benevolent countenance—dressed in black, with linen beautifully white—and with a massive chain and seals. I looked at him well: but I knew him not. I do not think that I ever saw him before. He sat down by my side—felt my pulse—and asked me several questions. Ah! a thought flashes to my mind: that good old gentleman is a doctor. And now,—yes—I think I can recollect it all,—I abused him—I insulted him very grossly;—and then some men entered and compelled me to go to bed. They undressed me by force. I struggled against them; but it was useless.

"Oh! what does it all mean? Why those men to coerce me?—why that doctor to attend upon me?—and why those bars at the window? Gracious God! it cannot be—no—no—the horrible thought—

"Yes: it must be so—I am really mad!

"Again I sit down, calmly and tranquilly, to write. I have weighed well my condition—have asked myself a thousand questions—have read what I have written above—have striven to recollect all the past—have carefully examined the present—and have dared to think of the future. By all this—and by the bars at the window—I know that I am mad!

"Yes: but I can write the word now without growing excited; and I must practise writing it again, so that I may by degrees gather to my aid such an amount of self-possession as to be able to trace on this paper all that has occurred to me. Then shall I possess a positive memorial—a substantial key to the past; and should I again forget, in an interval of delirium, all that has occurred. I can speedily recommit the mournful history to my memory during a lucid interval like the present.

"*Mad—mad—mad—mad!* There—now I can write the word without the least excitement; and this is a triumph already achieved. By gaining a complete and accurate knowledge of my real position, I shall know how to act. I am aware that I am in a lunatic asylum: I am also aware that I have passed through intervals of fearful delirium. But I must compose myself as much as possible. I cannot remain in this horrible place;—and if I cannot become really sane again, I may at all events pretend to be so—and then they will let me out. But in order to regain my intellects, or appear to recover my reason, I must remember all that has occurred to me, so as to be enabled to converse calmly and sensibly on the subject. Stay! I will think—I will reflect profoundly for the rest of the day; and to-morrow I will resume my pen.

"God forbid that the doctor or his men—or that prying old housekeeper, should look into the wardrobe! I would not lose my manuscript for worlds.

"June 13th, 1846.

"I have learnt the day of the month. The doctor has been with me for an hour; and he readily complied with my request to be furnished with an almanack. He told me that this is the 13th of June;

and henceforth I hope I shall be enabled to keep the dates accurately. When I was at school—but that is many years ago!—I used to make an almanack to calculate how long it was to the holidays; and every evening I scratched out the day that had just passed. Oh! happy—happy age of boyhood—wilt thou never come back? hast thou gone for ever? Now must I erase each day as it passes, and hope that the period of my release is near at hand. *That* shall be the holiday of my manhood, to which I must look forward with such anxious—fervid—burning hope!

"But to my narrative.

"A hundred thousand pounds became mine on the day that I attained my majority. That was nine years ago! I was my own master: my parents had long been dead—and my guardians attempted not even to advise me—much less control me. They were not relations—mere men of business to whom my fortune had been intrusted, with a view to its accumulation. The moment I became possessed of that wealth, I plunged headlong into the vortex of pleasure. Heavens! in what dissipation did I indulge. Who could drink deeper than I, and walk home steadily afterwards?—who was more sought after and caressed amongst the fair sex?—who was a more constant attendant at race-courses, gaming-houses, and the haunts of fashionable vice and aristocratic debauchery? Fool that I was! I imagined that to spend money profusely, was to enjoy life largely. I had three mistresses at the same time,—three women, having each a separate establishment, maintained at my cost! What were the consequences? At five-and-twenty my constitution was nearly ruined, and eighty thousand pounds of my fortune had been expended. The very principles of my existence seemed to be undermined—disease was gnawing at my vitals—an unbroken career of the wildest dissipation was hurrying me, with race-horse speed, to the tomb!

"Suddenly I awoke, as from a dream. But it was not because remorse touched me,—nor because good counsels were proffered me,—nor because some latent feelings of virtue sprang into existence. Neither was it because my fortune was nearly wasted and my health falling rapidly. No: but it was because I at that epoch saw my Editha for the first time! Oh! how can I retain my calmness now, when I think of her as I then beheld her,—beheld her in all the glory of her matchless beauty—radiant with that loveliness that seemed to surround her with the halo that only angels have! Yes—I was then twenty-five, and Editha Greville was nineteen—that delightful age when the female figure swells into womanly loveliness—round, full, and exquisitely modelled!

"We loved—almost at first sight; and though several weeks passed ere I ventured to declare my passion, I could read in Editha's eyes that I was far from being displeasing to her. She was an only child; her father was dead; her mother, though a woman of considerable wealth, mixed little in society; and the wildness of my conduct was not therefore fully known to Mrs. Greville. At the same time, she had heard that I was extravagant and imprudent; but when I implored her to bestow upon me the hand of her daughter, she yielded her assent, expressing a hope that I had sown all my wild oats by that time, and should grow steady in a matrimonial state. Thus was it that I became the recognised suitor of Editha; and when some of



Mrs. Greville's friends, who knew me well, represented to her that I was notoriously a half-ruined rake, the old lady had too much confidence in all the promises of reformation which I had made, to revoke the consent she had given to our union. Besides, she saw that Editha was deeply attached to me, and that the beautiful girl's happiness depended on the smooth progress of love's course.

"But, alas! painful thoughts forced themselves upon my mind. I felt that my constitution was ruined—and I believed myself to be in a consumption. Faithful to the solemn pledges which I had made to Mrs. Greville, I established a complete change in my habits; and instead of drinking wine to excess, I foreswore all alcoholic liquor whatsoever. Likewise, instead of passing my nights in dissipation, I returned home at an early hour and sought my couch. But the suddenness of this alteration in my habits produced effects which I can only compare to the terrible reaction that a man experiences when waking in the morning after a night of deep debauch. A dead weight fell upon

my spirits. I became so low and depressed that horrible thoughts of suicide were constantly floating in my brain. My nervousness was extreme and intensely painful. An unusually loud knock or ring at the front-door would make me start as if I had committed a crime and was expecting the officers of justice to come and arrest me. I was constantly conjuring up the most shocking visions respecting the future; and when immersed in those reveries, I verily believed that I was contemplating realities—such was the morbid state of my mind."

"It was therefore natural that I should begin to reflect upon the step which I had taken with regard to Editha. I had sought and won the affections of a beautiful creature, who was possessed of a generous heart, an amiable disposition, and a loving soul; and I was shocked to think that such a being, in all the vigorous health of youthfulness, should be led to the altar by one whose constitution was shattered, whose vital energies were almost ruined, and who seemed to be hovering on the very verge of the tomb! Oh! how maddening were

those thoughts! I looked upon myself as a villain—a deceiver; and often—often was I on the point of throwing myself at Mrs. Gresville's feet and exclaiming, 'Pardon me, madam, for having dared to ask the hand of your daughter in marriage! I am but a phantom—a shadow: the finger of Death is upon me,—and if Editha should accompany me to the altar, it is probable that in less than a year she will have to follow me to the tomb!'—But when I thought of Editha's matchless beauty, and pondered upon the immensity of the love that I experienced for her, I could not command the courage necessary to enable me to resign the hope of possessing such a treasure. Besides, in her society I could smile and be gay: her musical voice was more ravishing to my ears than the inspired strains of an improvisatrice;—her breath was more fragrant than the perfume of flowers—her lips more delicious than the honey-dew upon the blossoms! Oh! no—no: I could not resign my Editha! But no day had been as yet fixed for our marriage—and six weeks had already elapsed since I had proposed and was accepted. Shall I confess the truth? I dared not ask her mother to name the day: I shrank from the idea as if I were meditating a murder—had marked out my victim—but dreaded to settle in my own mind the night and the hour when the assassin-blow should be struck!

"I was lying in bed one morning, reflecting on all these things—for the dark fit of despondency was upon me—when my valet entered the room with the morning's newspapers. I listlessly unfolded one of the journals, when my eyes suddenly caught sight of an advertisement, headed thus:—'*Manhood: the Reasons of its Early Decline; with Plain Hints for its Complete Revivification.*' This book was announced to be an emanation from the pen of T. L. Surtess and Co., Consulting Surgeons, residing in one of the streets leading out of Soho Square; and it appeared by certain quotations of notices from the leading newspapers, that the book was a medical treatise of great utility, merit, and importance. Hope now dawned in upon my soul. Perhaps my constitution was not irretrievably damaged? Perchance I might not be in a consumption, after all? Such were my thoughts, after perusing that advertisement over and over again; and I resolved to lose no time in calling upon the able practitioners who undertook the revivification of any constitution, no matter how hopeless the case might seem. Accordingly, having hastily dressed myself, I repaired in a street cab to the address indicated in the advertisement. The house was one of imposing appearance; and the words '*Surtess and Co., Consulting Surgeons,*' were displayed in deep-black letters, on immense shining zinc-plater. The fawn-coloured Venetian blinds were drawn down; and I said to myself, as I alighted with a fluttering heart, 'Doubtless these eminent practitioners have patients waiting in every room to consult them.' Entering the passage, I found an inner door, with a bronze knocker and a ground-glass fan-light, on which were inscribed the same words as those that appeared on the polished zinc-plater. I was immediately admitted by a footman, and conducted up stairs to a drawing-room, every feature of which is at this moment as fresh in my memory as if I were seated and writing there now.

"This apartment at first sight impressed me with an idea of luxurious splendour; but a closer examination into its appointments showed me that the

most vulgar taste had presided over its fitting-up. The paper was of crimson and gold; and to the walls were suspended several paintings set in magnificent frames, which only rendered the daubs the more miserably ludicrous. Two of them were covered with plate-glass, as if they were very valuable; whereas they were as wretched as the others. 'Some unprincipled person,' thought I, 'must have imposed upon these worthy doctors, by recommending pictures to which I would not accord house-room. But men of philosophic minds and who are devoted to professional studies, are seldom good judges of works of art.' Thus ruminating, I continued my examination of the apartment; and I was struck with surprise at the utter vulgarity and absence of taste which characterised the profusion of French porcelain ornaments scattered about. There was a Chinese Joss, with a moveable head; and there was a pedlar mounted on a gigantic goat. At the corners of the fire-place were two paintings evidently cut out of a picture, and representing little charity-school girls. In the centre of the room stood a loo-table, upon which a writing-desk was placed; and this was surrounded by medical publications, bearing on their title-pages the magical names of those gentlemen whom I was so anxiously waiting to see. I had the curiosity to open one of the works; but I was disgusted with the obscenity of the coloured plates which it contained. A moment's reflection, however, induced me to believe that there could be nothing indecent in the development of the divine art of surgery; and I felt ashamed of myself for having even for an instant entertained such scruples. As a concluding observation respecting the drawing-room itself, I must remark that its entire appearance indicated the taste of a vulgar upstart, rather than the refined elegance of a polished mind.

"Having waited nearly three quarters of an hour, a footman made his appearance, and, with many obsequious bows, conducted me down stairs into a dining-room most gaudily and extravagantly furnished. The same grovelling vulgarity of taste which I had noticed elsewhere was apparent in the crimson damask curtains with yellow fringes and tassels—the looking-glasses in ponderous frames—the showy daubs suspended to the walls—and the furniture arranged for the purpose of display. Folding-doors admitted me into an inner apartment, of equally vulgar appearance; and beyond was a little room, only a few feet square, and which the footman, as he ushered me in, denominated *the surgery*.

"I must confess that my heart beat violently as I traversed those two apartments leading to the *sanctum* where I expected to find myself in the presence of the eminent medical practitioners. I had pictured to myself a couple of old and venerable-looking gentlemen, with genies stamped upon their high bald foreheads, and their eyes expressing all the powers of vigorous intellects. I was therefore somewhat surprised when, on being introduced into the surgery, I beheld only one individual, who was the very reverse of the portraiture I had drawn by anticipation. His features were of the Jewish cast: his complexion was of that swarthy and greasy description peculiar to the lower order of the Hebrew race;—his hair was black and very thick; and his whiskers met beneath his chin. His eyes were dark, and one of them was larger than the other: his bottle-nose was rather on one side; and

his countenance altogether was as ignoble, as vulgar, and as unintellectual as ever served as an index to a scurvy, grovelling soul. His dress was of the flashy kind which belongs partly to the upstart or *parvenu*, and partly to the swell-mob's-man. He wore a blue dress-coat, a gaudy waistcoat, and large loose trousers hollowed at the instep so as to be shaped to the polished leathern boot. A profusion of jewellery decorated his person;—a thick gold chain, with a large key, depended to his watch—his worked shirt was fastened with diamond and blue enamel studs;—and his dirty hands were covered with costly rings, which appeared as ill-placed upon the clumsy, grimy fingers as pearls would be round the neck of a pig.

"Such was the individual in whose presence I found myself; and had I not been at the time in such a desperate state of mind that I was eager to clutch at a straw, I should at once have seen through the man and his system. But I reassured myself with the adage which teaches that we should never judge by outward appearances; and it flashed to my mind that many men remarkable for the brilliancy of their intellect, were far from being prepossessing in either person, manners, or address. Moreover, I never had partaken in the shameful, unjust, and absurd prejudices which too many of my fellow-countrymen entertain in respect to the Jews; and therefore the mere fact of this Mr. Surtees being a member of the Hebrew race produced on my mind no unfavourable impression with regard to him.

"'Pray be seated,' said the medical gentleman, with a tone and manner which I at the time mistook for professional independence, but which I have since discovered to be the vulgar insolence of an ignorant, self-sufficient upstart. I took a chair in compliance with the invitation given; and when he had seated himself at his desk, he extended his dirty but jewel-bedizened paw, saying, 'Will you oblige me with yer card?'—I did as requested; but not without a little hesitation, for I had hoped to avoid giving my name and address.—'Ah! I see,' said Mr. Surtees, in a musing tone, as he examined the card: 'Mr. Macdonald,' he continued, reading my name. 'By the way, air you any relation to the Markies of Burlington? 'cos his family name is the same as your'n.'—I replied that I was not a relative of the nobleman mentioned.—'Vell, it don't signify,' proceeded Mr. Surtees. 'The Markies is a hexcellent friend of mine. He lays under a sight of hobligations to me. He come to me in the first instance with a constittution so reared out and shattered that no medical carpenter in all Hingland could have mended it up except me. But in the course of a foo weeks I putt him as right as a trivet; and now he'd go through fire and water to sarve me. It on'y cost him a couple of thousand pounds to get quite cured; and that was cheap enow, 'errins knows! But how comed you to call upon me this mornin'? Were it in consequence of havin' perooged von of my medical works? Ah! them sells vell, them does! Or were it 'cos you seed my advertisement in the noospapers?'—I was so completely bewildered by this outpouring of execrable English and vile grammar, that for some moments I was utterly unable to answer the questions put to me. Was it possible that this coarse, ignorant, and self-sufficient vulgarian could be an eminent medical authority—the author of valuable publications—the

celebrated surgeon whom the extracts from newspapers* quoted in his advertisement, spoke of so highly? I was astounded. But again did hope blind me to what the man really was: again did I reassure myself by the reflection that Mr. Surtees might be an excellent surgeon, although he was a miserable grammarian; and I accordingly recovered my self-possession sufficiently to inform him that I had called in consequence of reading his advertisement in the newspapers.

"The doctor seemed pleased at my answer, and immediately exclaimed, 'Vell, sir, and vot a blessin' it is that people *do* read advertisements: 'cos vy? they gets at the know'edge of heminent medikle prektishoners, which has devoted their lives to the hart of ealing all kinds of diseases. You see before you, sir,' he continued, in a pompous tone, and with

* It may seem astonishing how any respectable journals could be induced to lend themselves to such disgraceful puffery: but we will give our readers some little explanation upon the subject. The fact is that the quacks pay in the first instance for the insertion of the puffs as "paragraph-advertisements," and then quote them as being the editorial opinions of the newspapers in which they are thus inserted! We quote from some of the quack-advertisements a few specimens of these "*ad captandum*" notices:—

"The task of preparing and producing the work entitled * * *, by Messrs * * *, though apparently not one of magnitude, demands a most intimate acquaintance with the mysteries of a profession of the highest character. To say that the author has produced a volume which cannot be otherwise considered than as a treasure, and a blessing to the community, is not saying too much; and being written by a duly qualified medical practitioner, its pages give evidence of the results of much personal investigation, and great researches in the study of medicine. In a word, the work has merits which develop no superficial attainments, and we cordially and most earnestly recommend it for general perusal.—*Weekly Chronicle*."

"To the gay and thoughtless we trust this little work will serve as a beacon to warn them of the danger attendant upon the too rash indulgence of their passions; whilst to some it may serve as a monitor in the hour of temptation, and to the afflicted as a sure guide to health.—*Chronicle*."

"Their long experience and reputation is the patient's guarantee, and well deserves for the work its immense circulation.—*Era*."

"This is a medical publication, ably written, and develops the treatment of a class of painful maladies which has too long been the prey of the illiterate and the designing.—*United Service Gazette*."

"The author of this singular and talented work is a legally qualified medical man, who has had considerable experience in the treatment of the various disorders arising from the follies of early indiscretion. The engravings demonstrate the consequences of excesses, and, by its perusal, many questions may be satisfactorily replied to that admit of no appeal, even to the most confidential friend.—*Era*."

To explain more fully still the proceedings of the quacks and the artfulners of quackery, we refer our readers to the *Weekly Dispatch* of Sunday, July 2; and at the bottom of a column (not in the regular advertising department) will be found the ensuing advertisement:—

"[ADVERTISEMENT]—Holloway's Pills an excellent Remedy for Indigestion, Bilious and Liver Complaints.—All painful and distressing sensations arising from these complaints (which are too well known to sufferers to require a description here of their symptoms) may be easily removed by a few doses of this inestimable medicine; for such is its efficacy, that the most debilitated constitutions are effectually strengthened, and the aversion to motion overcome, thus giving buoyancy to the spirits, creating an appetite, and promoting digestion. At this season, when epidemics are so prevalent, these pills should be taken, as they surpass every other remedy as a preventative of disorders, even of the most malignant kind. Sold by all Druggists, and at Professor Holloway's Establishment, 244, Strand, London."

This advertisement was of course duly paid for: but Mr. Holloway may now, if he choose to do so, quote the *Dispatch* as having recommended the efficacy of his medicines to "strengthen the most debilitated constitutions;" and the public, trusting to such a powerful and honest authority as the *Dispatch*, will be induced to purchase the pills. Our readers can now comprehend how the medical quacks obtain *reviews* of their obscene books.

arrogant air, 'a man not knows hevery hin and bout of the human constitootion. No von knows so vell as myself wot consumption raly is.'—'Then you have made consumption your particular study, sir?' I observed, seeing that he paused, in order to elicit some remark from me.—'Rayther!' was his laconic answer. 'The fact is,' he continued, 'soo mediklo men is aweer what consumption is, nor in not part of the frame it begins. Vy, I vonce knowed a gentleman, sir, which had a rapid decline begin in the great toe of his left foot, and travel up'ards, till it spread itself over the hentire system. The doctors had all give him up, and the undertaker was actiually thinking of the good job he should soon have putt into his hand, ven I vos consulted. I made him take seventeen bottles of my bootiful *Balm of Zura*, and he rekivered in less than a fortnit.'

"Weak, nervous, and attenuated as I was, this anecdote made a deep impression upon me. I forgot the bad grammar—I lost sight of the arrogance and self-sufficient vulgarity: I saw and heard only the man who solemnly assured me that he had redeemed a fellow-creature from the jaws of death, when all other members of the faculty had given up the case as hopeless. Mr. Surtees doubtless perceived that he had worked me up to the pitch suitable to his purposes; and he accordingly said, 'Vell, my good sir, vill you be so good as to explain wot it is that you're come to consult me for?' I then frankly and candidly confessed that I had expended four-fifths of a large fortune in a career of unbroken dissipation—that my constitution was grievously impaired, if not absolutely ruined—that since I had given up drinking and all other sources of unnatural excitement, I was subject to such frequent fits of despondency that the idea of suicide was almost constantly in my imagination—that I loved and was beloved by a beautiful girl who was possessed of property—but that I felt afraid to contract the matrimonial engagement, lest I should leave her an unprotected widow in the course of a short time. Mr. Surtees listened with great attention; and when I had concluded, he appeared to reflect profoundly. At length he said, 'Vell, let's feel yer pulse.'—I extended my hand towards him; and he applied his thumb to a part of my wrist where I did not suppose that a pulse lay; but I concluded at the time that his great proficiency in medicine had led him to discover a new pulse, and that the best mode to test it was with the thumb.—'Wery weak pulse indeed!' he said, shaking his head with as much solemnity as the Chinese Joss up in his drawing-room might have been expected to display. 'But don't go for to give ray to despair, my dear sir; the case is a bad 'un, I admit—a wery, wery bad 'un; and I can't say as how that I ever knowed a wusser. Pray, who's the young lady which you intends to marry? I've a motive in axing.'—I thought that as the learned gentleman was already acquainted with my name and address, there could be no harm in answering this new question, the more especially as even if I refused to reply, he could easily institute those enquiries that would lead to a knowledge of the fact: I accordingly satisfied him on that head. 'Ah! I don't know her,' he observed, carelessly: then, after a few moments' reflection, he said, 'Vell, I undertake to cure you; but the business vill be a hexpensive von. You must write me a cheque for a hundred guineas, my consultation fee; and then I'll tell you wot you must do next.'—Reassured by the promises he thus

held out, I unhesitatingly gave him a draft for the amount demanded. He then opened a drawer, and drew forth a small case containing six bottles. 'This here is the rale elixir of life,' he said, in a tone of solemn mystery: 'it invigorates the constitootion in no time, and puts a reglar stopper on the advance of consumption. The Grand Turk has a case sent every week to him through his Hambassador, and all the crowned heads in Europe is patients of mine, I may say. Take a bottle of this bootiful balm daily; and ven it's all gone, come back again to me. The price of them six is fifteen guineas; and you can write me out another cheque at vonce'—I hastened to comply with this demand; and Mr. Surtees bowed me out of the surgery.

"But here I must leave off writing; for I am wearied—my brain begins to grow confused—and my memory fails me. Oh! what a fool—what an idiot I was, not to have seen through the man and his quackery on the occasion of that visit, the particulars of which I have detailed at such length.

* * * * *

"June 18th, 1846.

"I again resume my narrative. Five days have elapsed since I last put pen to paper; and that interval has been one of darkness. Yes—the fit was upon me: but it has passed—and I am now calm and collected once again. I have just read over all that I have written above; and I have laughed heartily at the fidelity and minuteness of my description of the first visit that I paid to the quack-doctor. Let me now continue my narrative; for the incidents are once more all fresh and vivid in my memory.

"I am well aware that the imagination has much to do with our diseases and our cures. Possessed of what I deemed to be a salutary medicine, my spirits rose; and at the close of each of the six days during which the supply of balm lasted, I said to myself, 'I certainly feel stronger and better.' The fits of despondency were far less frequent, and less intense: my appetite improved—and the colour came partially back to my cheeks. This change was no doubt effected principally by the steady life which I adopted, and by the increased mental tranquillity which I experienced. I was moreover filled with hope that a complete restoration to health would be accomplished; and thus, while at the time I attributed everything to the medicine, I have not the least doubt that the stuff was utterly valueless in itself. Editha was rejoiced to find my spirits so much improving; and her mother expressed her delight at the regular habits which I had adopted. I did not mention to a soul my visit to Mr. Surtees: that was my secret—and a sense of shame made me cherish it religiously. At the expiration of the week I called upon him again, and on this occasion was at once admitted into his surgery. There was another fee, of a hundred guineas—another six bottles of medicine prescribed, and another cheque given for the amount thereof. He asked me if I had read his book yet; and I was compelled to reply in the negative. 'Vell, never mind,' he said; 'I ain't offended; but you shall have a hooportunity of pe-rooging it before you come agen. I'll jest step up into the drawing-room and get you von.' He accordingly quitted the surgery; and during his temporary absence an irresistible feeling of curiosity

prompted me to look at a note which lay open upon the table. I read it; and thus it ran, word for word:—*'Deer Joe, You aw me 2 lend you mi diplomy for a few days, just to make a show with to a new payshent; but i vunce for all tell you as how i'd rayther not lett it go out of my house. Besides, it's of no use to you, 'cos it's made out in the name of La' Vert, and you've took the name of Surtess. So no more from your affecshonate brother, &c.'*—This note was signed by the name of La' Vert; and therefore it was apparent that the real appellation of my friend Mr. Surtess was Joseph La' Vert. It struck me in a moment that I had become the dupe of a quack; but I had sufficient command over myself to restrain my indignation when he returned to the room. He was accompanied by a woman—I cannot say a lady—whom he introduced to me as his wife. And here I must pause to say a few descriptive words of her.

"Mrs. Surtess was a vulgar, dark-complexioned Jewess, with a long hooked nose. Her flesh seemed as if it had been smeared with oil, and then wiped with a dry towel; but on her cheeks she wore an immoderate quantity of rouge. She was exceedingly stout, with an enormous bust: her hair, rough and wavy, was arranged in bands and plastered down with quince-pips. She was dressed in the most outrageous style, and as she herself expressed it, 'was about to go hout for a haring in the carridge.' Her gown was of green velvet; her shawl of bright red; and her bonnet of rose pink, adorned with a profusion of artificial flowers, inside and out. She wore very pink silk stockings and short petticoats, as she had conceived the erroneous impression that there was something attractive in her elephantine leg. As a matter of course, she carried a complete jeweller's shop about her person. She wore no gloves; and her large red hands were covered with rings. Her ear-rings were of gold studded with turquoise; and now her portraiture is complete.

"Scarcely had the ceremony of introduction taken place, when another female bounced into the apartment; and she was immediately presented to me as Mrs. Surtess's sister. Such a pair was never seen before! They looked like a butcher's daughters in their Sunday's best; and they were attired with an evidently studied view to contrast. For the sister's gown was of blue velvet, her shawl of flaunting yellow hue, and her bonnet white. These ladies, having favoured me with a good long stare and a few observations relative to the weather and such-like common-place topics, quitted the room to enter their vehicle which was waiting at the door. Mr. Surtess had the gallantry to accompany them as far as the carriage; and the moment I was alone again, I had the curiosity to traverse the two rooms and take a peep from the front window. The equipage was in perfect keeping with the appointments of the house and the attire of the occupants. It was a barouche, painted bright blue on the body: but all the under part and wheels were of straw colour. The inside was lined with yellow morocco. It was drawn by two brown cobs, the harness exhibiting a profusion of silver; and the coachman's livery was of a gaudy blue, with buttons also of silver.

"But while I was making these observations from the window, my ears were saluted with a brief colloquy that took place in the passage between Mr. Surtess and his wife, ere he handed her to the carriage. They doubtless believed that I

had remained in the surgery, and little thought that I was near enough to catch all they said.—'Vell, Joe,' exclaimed Mrs. Surtess, 'any monzel' with that pale-faced young feller vich you said were so 'ansome and made me come in to see?'—'A good moza-motton,'† he answered, with a vulgar chuckling laugh.—'Oh! then, he stumped the guelt?'‡ demanded the woman, joining in the cachinnation.—'To be sure he did, my love,' responded this precious consulting-surgeon: 'and I means to have a good deal more out on him afore I've done.'—'Oh! wery vell, then,' returned Mrs. Surtess: 'in this case the boy Abey must have a new polkahat, and little Joe a new welwet dress out of it.'—'All right!' exclaimed the consulting-surgeon. 'Come, cut along, and astonish the natives in the park a bit. I shall jine you presently.' He then handed the two women into the carriage; and I hurried back to the surgery, where I seated myself till his return—so that he could not suspect I had quitted the place during his temporary absence. I longed to tell him all I knew or suspected relative to his real character: but a fear of exposure made me silent—and I took my leave of him with as much civility as I could bring myself to bestow upon such a person.

"I knew that I had been completely and thoroughly victimised: but on reflection, I was glad of it. I saw that the circumstance of taking the medicine had stimulated my imagination, and had thereby aided in improving my health. On my return home, I threw the six bottles away without drinking another drop of the trashy balm; and I sent at once for a respectable physician, who, for a fee of five guineas, gave me proper advice. I then came to the conclusion that it is always better, under any emergency, to have recourse to legitimate assistance than to seek the aid of advertisers—no matter whether the subject involved be medicine, law, or money. My health improved rapidly; and at the expiration of three months I became the happy husband of the equally happy Editha.

Here must I pause for a time: the recollection of my wedding-day has revived memories which overpower me!

* * * * *

"June 20th, 1846.

"I resume my narrative. Twelve months had elapsed after my marriage with the loveliest and most amiable woman in the universe; and nothing had transpired to interrupt our felicity. A boy had blest our union—and I was as happy as a husband and father could possibly be. My health was almost completely re-established; and my habits were regular and domestic. I loathed the idea of those exciting pleasures and feverish enjoyments in the vortex of which I had nearly wrecked everything—health, fortune, and reputation; and Mrs. Greville, who dwelt with us, would often assure me with a smile that I was the very pattern of good husbands. My brother, who had become a magistrate, was a frequent visitor at our house; and all was progressing in peace, comfort, and tranquillity, when an incident suddenly occurred to interfere with that smiling prospect.

"It was late one evening, shortly after my beloved Editha's recovery from her confinement, that

* Luck. † Piece of luck. ‡ Money.

I was informed that a person who refused to give his name desired to speak with me in private. I ordered the servant to show him into the library; and thither I immediately afterwards proceeded. The man whom I encountered there was a short, thick-set fellow, with a forbidding countenance: he was flashily dressed, and had about him an air of jaunty impudence as if he had come upon some evil mission in which he knew that he should succeed. I asked him his business, without inviting him to be seated—for I conceived a dislike to him the instant I set eyes upon his sinister features. 'Your name is Macdonald?' he said, flinging himself into a chair in a very free-and-easy manner.—'There is no necessity for you to acquaint me with that fact,' I observed, assuming as chilling a tone as possible.—'Oh! but there is, though!' he ejaculated: 'because I must make sure that I am speaking to the right person. Well, you admit your name: now will you tell me whether you're the gentleman that married Miss Editha Greville?'—'What means this impudence?' I demanded angrily. 'Explain your business, sir, without farther circumlocution.'—'I'll come to the point in a minute,' returned the man, quite unabashed. 'Fifteen or sixteen months ago you used to visit a certain gentleman who lives not a hundred miles from Soho Square.'—I started and turned pale: for it struck me in a moment that the fellow was alluding to the *consulting-surgeon*.—'Well, now I see that it's all right,' he exclaimed, doubtless drawing this inference from the confusion of my manner. 'Of course you would rather it shouldn't be known that you *did* visit the gentleman,' he added emphatically.—'I do not understand your meaning,' I replied.—'Look here, then,' continued the fellow: 'it would not be very pleasant to have your brother, your mother-in-law, your friends, your tradesmen, your servants, and even your wife, made acquainted with the fact that you were under Mr. Surtees for some time previous to your marriage.'—'I never visited him but twice!' were the words that I gasped out, for horrible sensations were coming rapidly over me.—'Never mind how often it was,' cried the man, in a brutal tone: 'you did call to consult him, and that's enough for me. Now then, 'tis for you to say how much you'll give me to keep the secret.'—'Wretch! extortioner!' I ejaculated, rage succeeding alarm in my breast.—'It's of no use to attempt to bully me,' said the ruffian, with the most cold-blooded composure: 'I want money, and I mean to get it out of you.'—'Or else?' I said, all my wretched feelings returning, as I saw myself threatened with exposure, shame, and irretrievable degradation.—'Or else,' he repeated, 'I shall tell the secret to all the people I have named; and then we shall see whether you will ever hold up your head in society again.'—'And how much money do you require?' I asked, my heart sinking within me.—'Five hundred will do for the present,' he responded imperiously.—'For the present?' I cried, echoing his words: 'what! do you mean to visit me again for such a purpose?'—'Not if you shell out at once, and without making any more words about it,' he said.—There was no alternative save to comply; and I accordingly counted into his hand the Bank-notes for the sum named. In another minute he had taken his departure—and I was left alone to meditate upon the scene that had just occurred.

"It was a long time before I could so far compose my countenance and my feelings as to be able to re-

turn to the parlour without exciting the suspicions of my wife and mother-in-law that something unpleasant had taken place. But I managed to conceal the sorrow which the event of the evening had engendered within me; and early on the following morning I paid a visit to Mr. Surtees. He did not appear at first to recollect me—or, at all events, if he did, he was a wonderful adept in playing the part of forgetfulness: but when I mentioned my name, he exclaimed, 'Vy, is it possible that you've come back to consult me again?'—'Far from it,' I answered, with a bitterness which I could not hide, and which he failed not to notice; for he bit his lip, and coloured deeply. I then related to him the particulars of the visit I had received on the previous evening, and accused him of being the prime mover in the matter. But he repelled the charge with so much indignation—whether real or feigned I cannot even now determine—that I certainly believed him at the time; and, were I at present writing for the purpose of having my narrative read by the world, I should be loth indeed to have it inferred that Mr. Surtees was in reality mixed up with the case of extortion. Much as I hate and despise him, I will not do him a wanton injustice; and I am therefore bound to state that he was warm and energetic in his assurances of complete innocence respecting the transaction.—'But how could the man have known that I ever *did* visit you?' I asked.—'Vell things does get abroad in a many most unaccountable ways,' he responded: 'but I take my Gosh to witness that I'm as clear of this business as the babe vot's unborn. Vot can I do to convince you that such is the fact?'—'I do not entertain such a dreadful opinion of human nature as to disbelieve you, sir,' was my rejoinder; and I took my leave. But, distressed and harrassed as I was, I could not help noticing the strong and disagreeable odour of fried fish that came up from the lower regions of the dwelling: nor could I avoid a smile as I caught a glimpse of Mrs. Surtees, who was running hastily up stairs, having evidently emerged from the kitchen—for her swarthy countenance was as greasy as it could be, and her appearance was dirty and slovenly in the extreme. Yet, a few hours later in the day, this woman would doubtless turn out in all the flaunting gaud of her rainbow attire and in the profuse display of her costly jewellery!

"I must again repeat that I quitted Mr. Surtees' abode with the conviction that he was anything but an accomplice in the scheme of extortion; and I said to myself, as I returned homeward, 'The scene of last night is one of those penalties which we are doomed to pay for the irregularities and evil courses of our youthful years. But, even though Surtees himself be innocent, is not the extortionate deed all the same a result of an infamous system of quackery? Destroy that system—and the quietude of men's homes could not thus be troubled by the visits of extortioners!'—By degrees my mind grew calmer; and as weeks and months fled away, I had almost ceased to think of the occurrence which had so much ruffled me, when one evening the man reappeared at the house. Again was the ominous message delivered to me while I was seated in the society of my beloved wife and her excellent mother—again did I see the man in private—and again was I compelled to endure his cool insolence and yield to his extortionate demands. Another five hundred pounds was transferred from my pocket to his own;—and once more was I forced to tell

the real condition of my feelings when I rejoined the ladies in the parlour. And now, as time slipped away, I did not lose the misgivings that this second visit had excited in my mind—I could not forget that I was in the power of a villain, who was certain to come back again. Months passed; and a third time—I remember it well—it was on Christmas eve,—the fatal message was delivered to me. On this occasion I started so violently and betrayed so much confusion that both my wife and mother-in-law observed my agitation. I however hurried away, without responding to their anxious enquiries; and when once more in the presence of the extortioner, I heaped the bitterest reproaches upon him. He heard me with a coolness and a self-possession that only augmented my wrath; and at length I ceased speaking through sheer exhaustion. He then informed me, in his imperious and rude manner, that he had an opportunity of emigrating under the most favourable services—that he required a thousand pounds—and that if I gave him this sum, he would never trouble me again. I bound him by the most solemn oaths to that pledge; and, to save myself from a shame that would have crushed me down to the very dust and rendered life intolerable, I gave the miscreant a cheque on my bankers for the large amount which he demanded. But on my return to the company of my Editha and Mrs. Greville, I was compelled to invent falsehoods to account for my confusion; and I beheld, with pain and bitter grief, that they both saw that I was deceiving them—that I was concealing the real truth—and that there was something upon my mind!

"Oh! yes—and they conjectured truly; for my

peace was now so thoroughly disturbed, that I despaired of regaining it. I felt convinced that, in spite of the villain's solemn vows, he would come back again; and I dreaded to be at home—for every knock at the door made me start nervously. If I walked or rode out, on my return I dreaded lest the servants should inform me that a certain person had called for me during my absence, and would look in again in the evening. Thus my life became a veritable burthen to me; and my sorrow was aggravated by the stern necessity of retaining it all in my own breast. Often and often did I think of inventing some excuse to induce my wife and her mother to consent that we should break up our establishment in London, and repair to the continent. But what apology could I devise for such a strange proceeding?—and, moreover, would not the extortioner find me out, if he set himself to the work? because to imagine any feasible ground for changing our name, was impossible. Thus months passed away, without seeing me determine upon any plan to frustrate the extortioner should he return; and I saw that my Editha's health and spirits began to fail—because she knew that I was secretly unhappy!

"And the extortioner *did* come back: and again was I forced to yield to his demands.—Two thousand pounds did he obtain from me on this occasion; and when I reminded him of his solemn pledges and sacred vows, he laughed outright in my face. Oh! how I hated—abhorred—loathed that man! I could have slain him on the spot: but I thought of my dear wife and innocent boy, and I restrained my hand. And now my mind became seriously un-

* In a publication entitled *The Medical Adviser*, and issued some years ago, we find the following observations relative to quacks and quackery:—"The legislators in almost every civilized society have considered them as pests and a disgrace to every country where they are to be found, and penal laws have therefore been enacted for the suppression of quackery. The Colleges of Physicians were instituted in different kingdoms of Europe, to examine all persons who undertook the practice of the art, to inspect all drugs in the apothecaries' shops, and destroy such as were unfit; and there can be no doubt but their power extended to the examinations of nostrums in general, and on their report, the vendors were subject to severe penalties. In the reign of James I., an order of council, grounded on former laws, was issued for the apprehension of all quacks, in order to their being examined by the censors of the College of Physicians; on that occasion several mountebanks, water-tasters, ague-charmers, and vendors of nostrums were fined, imprisoned, and banished. This wholesome severity, it may be supposed, checked the evil for a time; but in the reign of William III. it became again necessary to put the laws in force against these base vermin and miscreants, in consequence of which many of them, when examined, confessed their utter ignorance to such a degree, as to be unable either to read or write; others, it was found, had been attempting to procure abortion in unfortunate single women; several of them were discovered to be fortune-tellers, match-makers, frauders, plimps, and bawds; some of these miscreants were set in the pillory, some put on horseback with their faces to the horse's tail, with their noses and lips slit, and their necks decorated with a collar of urinals, and afterwards whipped, imprisoned, branded, and banished."

The victims of quacks might even now show the scoundrels, if they chose, that there are laws in existence fully strong enough to punish them; and we should advise those who have been plundered to state their cases to their solicitors. It is intolerable that the public should be preyed upon by a set of villains who live in splendid mansions, ride in their carriages, and maintain luxurious tables at the expense of the unfortunate dupes whom their advertisements entrap.

Several years ago, Mr. Charles Dunne, a surgeon, presented to Parliament a petition against Quackery; and in that well reasoned document we find the ensuing paragraph, which, we feel convinced, our readers will peruse with interest:—

"That the mal-practices of quack doctors are wisely guarded against in every country of Europe, except Britain; for no person (under pain of fine and imprisonment, is al-

lowed to take the charge of the sick, or even to direct the application of medicines, without having gone through the proper ordeals of examination as to his professional knowledge and acquirements. In England it is notorious that we have not only carpenters, tailors, bricklayers' labourers, lead-pencil-makers, Jews old clothes men, journeymen linen-drappers, and men of colour, but even women quacks, who practise their duplicities on the unwary and unthinking part of the public, by plundering all those who have the folly to approach them, whilst many are absolutely deprived of life by them, and others, who have the misfortune to escape death, are left to drag on a miserable existence with an entirely broken constitution for the remainder of their days. The baneful effects, too, of patent medicines, as they are called, deserve particular notice, the composition of which is formed in such a manner as to render their administration at all times dangerous, and but too often fraught with death; whereas, on the Continent, no medicines (similar to those with us called patent) are permitted to be sold, without first having been analyzed by the constituted chemical authorities, and duly examined by the respective faculties of medicine. It is clear from what occurs in law, divinity, and physic, that a foundation or competent education by a course of study, is essentially necessary to exercise any of these different departments, and whoever exercises them without this education cannot possibly do it with advantage to the community. For an unscientific knowledge of the treatment of any disease, even if occasionally successful in its object, can never be trusted to; for if any unforeseen circumstance should arise, such practitioner can neither avert the mischief, nor find means to relieve the patient, as a man of real science would do;—mere experience alone, devoid of science, can have no other claim on public notice than as empiricism, and, like a seaman, incapable of taking an observation when anything inauspicious occurs at sea, is unable to direct his course. Empiricism in all professions being the opposite to science, and directed by no regular principle but the knowledge of one or two isolated facts, is evidently hostile to the advancement of liberal principles, and too often ruinous to those confiding in such hollow pretensions. Empiricism, therefore, in religion, law, politics, and physic, is the hydra to be guarded against, as the bane of real knowledge and improvement; and wherever encouraged, such empiricism is always subversive of the best interests of mankind. The great object of legislation should be to impose a wholesome restraint on any attempt calculated to overstep the just and fair bounds, which the welfare of the people requires."

settled—a painful nervousness constantly maintained its influence over me—my health gave way again, as rapidly under the heavy weight of sorrow as it did beneath the wearing effects of dissipation. Oh! yes—and what was worse than all, was that my Editha grew paler and thinner day by day—visibly;—and I dared not attempt to console her—I could not force my tongue to frame a lie to assure her that I myself was happy. Thus was our once happy home changed to a scene of gloom: a deep despondency hung upon us all—and I perceived, with ineffable anguish, that Mrs. Greville began to view me with distrust. Perhaps she thought that some crime lay heavy upon my soul: yes—this must have been her impression—or she would doubtless have questioned me. But she did not live long enough to behold the sad catastrophe: a short though severe illness snatched her to the tomb—and, circumstanced as I was, I rejoiced in secret at the event,—for I said to myself, ‘There is at all events one being the less to deceive—one being the less to watch me with mournful and silently appealing looks!’—O God! it was not strange—it was not wonderful if madness were beginning even then to undermine the strong tower of my reason!

“Scarcely were the remains of my mother-in-law consigned to the tomb, when the extortioner reappeared at the house. His demands increased in proportion to the concessions which were made to him by my fears; but I was totally unable to comply with his present exigencies. It is true that there was much property still left;—but it was settled on my wife—and I could not command from my own resources the sum needed. This I candidly told him, and besought him to be merciful;—yes, with tears in my eyes did I beseech him. The wretch! the monster! what cared he for my grief—my anguish? He desired me to have recourse to a discount—gave me the address of a money-lender—and said he should return on the following evening. Accordingly—impelled by my wretched, wretched destiny—I visited the money-lender, who advanced me three thousand pounds on my own acceptance, and at most usurious interest. The whole of that money found its way into the pocket of the extortioner; and when he had taken his departure, I fell down in a fit. For days and days did I keep my bed; and when I awoke to consciousness, it was from a delirium. My dear wife was seated by my bed-side; but, O God!—how pale—how altered—how wan she was with long vigils and deep grief! I questioned her guardedly to ascertain whether in my ravings I had betrayed my secret: but I learnt, beyond a doubt, that I had not. Then I began to breathe more freely; and she, throwing her arms about my neck, exclaimed, while tears streamed in torrents down her cheeks, ‘My beloved husband, you have some dreadful grief preying upon your mind. May I not be made your confidant? I have observed that always after the visits of the man who calls every now and then, and invariably in the evening, you are stricken as with a heavy affliction. Oh! what does it all mean?’—I endeavoured to console her—to soothe her—to reassure her as well as I could; but I saw that she only pretended to be solaced, for my sake!

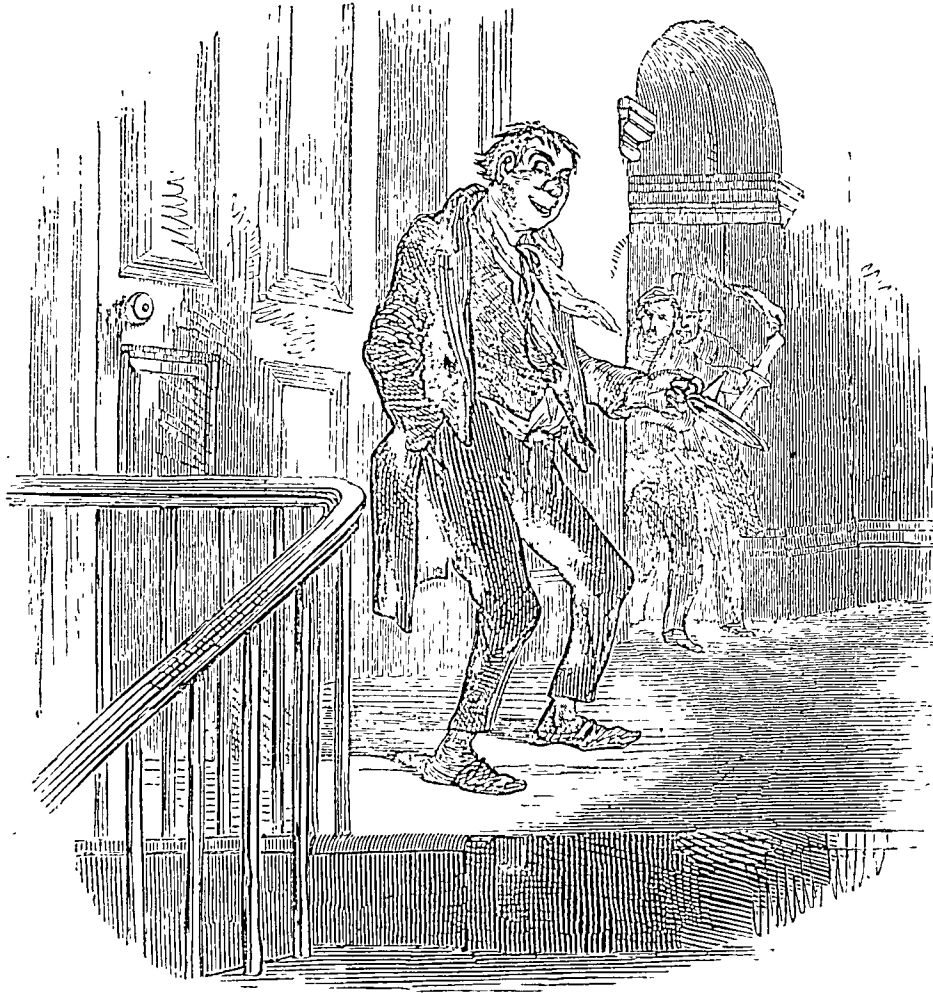
“Well—I recovered: but happiness and I had shaken hands for ever. I felt as if I were followed about by an invisible demon, whose breath poisoned the very atmosphere that I breathed. I know that my

brain was reeling—that my reason was tottering—that I was going mad! Often did I think seriously of murdering my wife and child, and then putting an end to my own existence. But I dared not lay violent hands upon them; and I had too much moral courage still left to seek death so long as there remained a single tie, however feeble, to bind me to life. But a new misfortune was in store for me—for us. A solicitor in whom I and my wife trusted, obtained our signatures to certain deeds under the foulest representations; and by virtue thereof he sold out all the stock standing in Editha’s name in the Bank. He then absconded; and we were suddenly reduced from affluence to comparative penury. I was unable to honour my acceptance; and the discounteer would listen to no terms. He said that he had passed it away in the regular course of business, and could not take it up himself. I was arrested and thrown into prison. My friends deserted me, believing that wanton extravagance on my part had led to this catastrophe. Yes: all save my beloved wife deserted me—and she, the angel! remained faithful to me! We had two hundred and fifty pounds a year still left; and on the houses which produced this income, my wife insisted on raising the money necessary to obtain my release. But such a proceeding would have left us beggars; and I could not endure the idea of misery for one—two—three persons! No: the property was so secured that my creditor could not touch it—and I resolved, by the advice of an attorney, to apply for relief to the Insolvents’ Court. I did so; and the creditor opposed me on the ground of extravagance. I could give no account of the manner in which I had disposed of the money he had advanced me—and when the opposing counsel asked me, on my oath, whether I had not lost it at gambling, I greedily snapped at the means of explanation thus furnished, and perjured myself by the utterance of an affirmative. Oh! that miscreant extortioner!—he drove me to ruin—a prison—the Insolvents’ Court—perjury—and lastly to a mad-house! Great God! how can I write thus tranquilly when I think of all the wrongs that I have endured?

“July 23rd, 1846.

“I have been compelled to desist again: but at length I resume my pen. My ideas are rapidly becoming more settled: I think that I shall recover altogether, if I can but manage to escape from this place!

“I stated that I appeared at the Insolvents’ Court, and was opposed by the holder of the bill for three thousand pounds. The Commissioner remanded me to prison for twelve months as a punishment for wanton and profligate expenditure. I shall not dwell upon that long incarceration: it was horrible to a sensitive soul like mine. Even Editha, patient and loving as she was, failed to solace me altogether. There were intervals of anguish so bitter that I fancied myself at times to be already dead and enduring the torments of hell. Dreadful thought! But at length the time passed—and I was once more free. We took a neat little cottage in the suburbs of the metropolis; and tranquillity seemed to have been restored to us at last. Our son thrived gloriously: Oh! what a handsome



boy he became—what a handsome boy he must be now! Nearly two years passed—and I was recovering my mental serenity, when one day I met the extortioner in the street. Oh! what a cold shudder came over me as I saw his eyes fixed upon me! It seemed as if a horrible spectre had suddenly started up from the earth to horrify and appal me. I beheld *Ruin* personified; and a faintness came over me. But I was recalled to a poignant sense of my misery by the well-known voice that fell upon my ears, making fresh demands upon my purse. I took the man into an obscure public-house close by; and, as there was no one in the room save ourselves at the time, we could converse freely upon the business. Freely, indeed! when every word he uttered fell like drops of molten lead upon my heart—and every syllable I breathed in return hissed from my parched tongue like water passing over red-hot iron! What could I do? The fiend insisted upon having money, and swore that he would follow me home. He, however, measured his demands to my means, and insisted upon having three hundred pounds by a given hour the next evening. We parted—and I

saw that he dogged me; indeed, he did not attempt to conceal himself nor his intentions as he followed me until I entered my own door—and I knew that it was useless either to turn upon him in a hostile manner, or to attempt to baffle his aim.

“Heaven only knows how I contrived to explain to my wife the reason of my altered appearance—or rather, how I managed to conceal the real cause beneath a falsehood. But I did succeed in reassuring her somewhat; and on the following day I went to the discounter—the same discounter who had lent me money before—to ask him for a loan. It was a desperate step, taken by a desperate man: but, to my surprise, he consented without the slightest hesitation to accommodate me. I received the money—gave my note of hand—and paid the amount to the extortioner. But things had now reached a crisis with me—and I became so unsettled in my mind that Editha was seriously alarmed. I remembered that my brother, the magistrate, was sent for; and he visited the house after having been long estranged from me. Then a mist came over my memory; and, when I awoke, I was—here!

"Yes—here, where I now pen these lines! Oh! I have been mad—raving mad; and Heaven knows that I have endured enough to make me so. Such persecution could only end in insanity. But I am better now: nay—I am well—although my friends will not believe it. My brother was here yesterday; and I saw by the way in which he humoured me when I told him I was fast recovering my reason, that he still imagines me to be insane. I implored him to let me see Editha and my boy: he declared that I should have that pleasure next Sunday. He likewise told me that they were well in health, but deeply grieved on my account.

"Now I have made up my mind how to act. I shall escape from this horrible place, and proceed to France. There I shall adopt an assumed name—and thence I shall write to Editha to join me at once with our son. We shall be beyond the reach of the extortioner—and tranquil, if not happy days may yet await us. Yes—this is my hope! But shall I destroy the manuscript upon which I have laboured so arduously, and which has furnished me with an occupation that has done me so much good? No: I cannot consent to annihilate the papers which contain a narrative so fraught with awful warning. But does it not likewise contain my secret?—and is not my name mentioned in the course of the recital? Hark! footsteps approach—I must conceal my papers——"

CHAPTER CLXXXIX.

SCENES IN THE LUNATIC ASYLUM.

THUS terminated the extraordinary manuscript which Lord William Trevelyan found in the wardrobe, and the perusal of which occupied him nearly two hours.

He was undecided how to dispose of the papers. Should he return them to the place where they had been concealed?—should he destroy them?—should he take them away with him, in the hope of being one day enabled to discover their writer, and by restoring them to him convince him that they had fallen into the possession of an honourable man, who, though having had the curiosity to read them, would, nevertheless, religiously keep the secret which they contained?

For, from the abrupt termination of the manuscript, Lord William very naturally concluded that the unfortunate author had succeeded in effecting his escape from the lunatic-asylum very shortly after he had penned the last words in the narrative; and the young nobleman, therefore, considered it to be possible, though perhaps not very probable, that he might sooner or later encounter Mr. Macdonald in the great and busy world.

Lord William had likewise another motive for retaining the papers.

The reader has seen enough of him to be aware that there was in his disposition much of the same chivalrous spirit and philanthropic principle which characterised the Earl of Ellingham; and it was therefore natural that he should become suddenly impressed with the idea of adopting measures, in due course, for the purpose of fully exposing the atrocious system of quackery that was carried on by pseudo-medical advertisers.

He remembered that the newspapers contained

many advertisements announcing such works as the one which had proved the means of ensnaring the unfortunate Mr. Macdonald; and he was resolved to lose no time in employing his solicitor to institute all the necessary inquiries into the characters, histories, proceedings, and social positions of the scoundrels who thus accumulated large fortunes by means of the most atrocious quackery, deceit, rascality, and extortion.

The manuscript which chance had this night thrown in his way, contained so many important particulars, and furnished such a complete clue to the entire ramifications of the dark iniquity which the young nobleman was determined to expose, that he regarded it as a powerful auxiliary to the crusade he was about to undertake; and this consideration, added to the motives already mentioned, decided him in retaining possession of the document.

It was now one o'clock in the morning; and a profound silence reigned throughout the lunatic asylum.

Lord William noiselessly opened the door of his chamber, and looked forth into the long passage, which was partially lighted by a single lamp that had been left burning.

No living being was to be seen; and nothing disturbed the dead stillness of the hour and the place.

It now struck the young nobleman that the door of the chamber which he was anxious to enter—namely, No. 12, in the same passage as his own apartment—was most probably locked; and, in this case, he made up his mind to force it at all risks.

A little farther reflection suggested to him that, inasmuch as he had seen the housekeeper with only a single key in her hand, it was probable that this key was a pass to all the chambers; and he thence inferred that the key of his own room might perhaps fit the lock of the door belonging to No. 12.

At all events this was the first experiment that he resolved to try; and, without any longer delay, he proceeded as cautiously as possible down the passage, until he reached the chamber which he hoped and believed to be the one occupied by his friend.

There was a bolt outside the door: this was immediately drawn back;—and Trevelyan essayed the key.

To his indescribable joy, the key turned easily in the lock; and, with a beating heart, the nobleman entered the room—closing the door behind him.

The chamber was quite dark: but Trevelyan speedily groped his way to the window and drew aside the curtains, so as to permit the powerful moonlight to pour its silver flood into the room.

He now approached the bed—and there, to his delight, he beheld the well-known, though worn and wasted, countenance of his friend Sir Gilbert Heathcote, who was wrapped in slumber.

Lord William shook him gently; the baronet awoke with a sudden start and ejaculation; but at the same instant a friendly voice said, hurriedly, "Fear nothing! 'tis I—Trevelyan—and I am come to deliver you from this accursed place."

Sir Gilbert, who had raised his head from the pillow, fell back again, and closed his eyes for a few moments. He fancied that he was dreaming. He could not believe that those welcome words had in reality sounded in his ears, or that the moonlight had shown him the form of his friend by the bedside.

Trevelyan did not choose to interrupt the baronet's reverie immediately; he comprehended the prudence of allowing him to collect his scattered ideas, and compose his thoughts.

"Is it really you, my dear young friend?" Sir Gilbert asked abruptly; and, starting up in the bed, he seized Trevelyan's hand, and gazed fixedly upon his countenance.

"Yes, it is no dream," responded Lord William, pressing the baronet's hand with all the fervour of his generous friendship; "I am here to effect your escape, and there is no time to be lost."

Still the baronet could scarcely believe the joyful announcement thus made to him; and Trevelyan, duly impressed with the necessity of tranquillising and reassuring his friend's mind as much as possible ere the attempt at departure should be made,—fearing likewise that the baronet's intellect had been somewhat impaired by the sense of wrong and the horrors of imprisonment in a lunatic asylum,—began to speak upon such topics as were calculated to direct his thoughts into a salutary channel.

"My dear Heathcote," he said, "endeavour to call to your aid as much calmness and self-possession as possible; for a single inadvertence or false step may ruin our project by alarming the house. Remember that the place is as well protected and defended, and probably as well watched, as a gaol: and we must proceed with caution—courage—and coolness."

"But how did you find your way into the establishment?" enquired Sir Gilbert, his ideas becoming more settled.

"By pretending to be insane," answered Trevelyan; "and I have succeeded in thoroughly duping the Doctor."

"Oh! my generous—my noble-hearted friend!" exclaimed the baronet: "how can I ever sufficiently prove my gratitude—"

"Hush! speak not with excitement!" interrupted Trevelyan. "I am only doing towards you what you would unhesitatingly perform for me under the same circumstances. And now—as I am anxious to relieve your mind as much as possible from any uneasiness or suspense that it may experience—I must at once inform you that Mrs. Sefton is in good health, and at this moment in the happy expectation of shortly seeing you again; for she is aware of the scheme which I have adopted to restore you to liberty."

"Heaven be thanked for these assurances!" exclaimed Sir Gilbert: then, after a few moments' pause, he said, "I need scarcely ask you to explain how you became acquainted with Mrs. Sefton. She was no stranger to the friendship subsisting between you and me—and I therefore conclude that, alarmed by my sudden and inexplicable disappearance, she sought your counsel and assistance."

"All has occurred precisely as you conjecture," answered Trevelyan. "But do you now feel equal to the task—"

"Of making an effort to recover my freedom?" ejaculated Sir Gilbert, leaping from the couch. "Let us not lose another moment! The atmosphere of this place seems oppressive, and heavy to breathe. I pant—I yearn—I long for liberty."

Thus speaking, the baronet began hastily to put on his attire, and in a few minutes he was dressed.

"Now," said Trevelyan, "we must decide upon the course to be adopted. Doubtless there is a

porter to keep watch all night in the hall?" he added, interrogatively.

"Yes," answered Sir Gilbert: "and I am also certain that a man patrols the garden. Besides, the keepers inside the house are as wakeful and as watchful as the fiends of Pandemonium; and the least noise will bring half-a-dozen strong and desperate fellows upon us. For my part, I have not the slightest objection to embrace the alternative of fighting our way through all opposition—"

"But the consequences of defeat would be most disastrous," interrupted Trevelyan. "The Doctor would thereby gain an excuse for coercing both you and me; and although I am as it were my own prisoner, yet I have sworn not to quit these walls unless accompanied by you."

"Generous friend!" exclaimed Sir Gilbert. "Were we well armed, we might bid defiance to the Doctor and all his gang: but weaponless—powerless as we are—"

"Do not despond, Heathcote," said Trevelyan, observing that the baronet spoke in a mournful tone: "the task that I have undertaken, I will accomplish! There appear to me to be two modes of procedure. The first is to descend as noiselessly as possible to the hall—seize upon the porter—master him—and then effect our escape by the front-door. The other is to force away the bars from the window of this room—make a rope of the bed-clothing—descend into the garden—and take our chance with the watchman. Either project is attended with the risk of creating an alarm: but it is for you to decide, from your knowledge of the premises and the habits of its inmates, which scheme is the more feasible."

"The former," responded Sir Gilbert, after a few moments' deep reflection. "The watchman in the garden would probably observe us at the window, removing the bars; and an alarm would thus be raised even before we were prepared to attempt an escape by those means. On the other hand, the porter sleeps in the hall:—of this fact I am well assured, because I saw the bed temporarily made up for him there on the night that I was brought hither:—therefore our chances of success lie in that direction."

"Such also is my idea," observed Trevelyan. "Let us proceed at once—and permit me to take the lead."

The young nobleman and the baronet stole cautiously forth from the chamber, treading so lightly that their steps raised not a sound to disturb the silence which prevailed throughout the establishment.

They descended to the first floor in safety: and there they paused for a few minutes on the landing, listening with suspended breath.

The deep and regular respiration of the porter now reached their ears from the hall below; and they thus obtained the assurance that the man slumbered.

Exchanging looks of satisfaction, they descended the last flight of stairs;—and, by the hall lamp, they perceived the porter comfortably ensconced in a truckle-bed that was made up for him in a convenient corner. The light fell on his rubicund countenance, which was surmounted by a cotton nightcap: but the brawny arm that lay outside the coverlid, and the tracing of his form as shaped by the bed-clothes, showed full well that he was a man of herculean stature and proportionate strength.

Nothing daunted—but resolving upon a desperate effort to accomplish the purpose he had in view—Lord William Trevelyan led the way into the hall; and he had just ascertained the fact that there was a bunch of large keys peeping forth from beneath the sleeping porter's pillow, when the door of the supper-room suddenly opened, and Mr. Sheepshanks staggered forth.

The reverend gentleman carried a candle in his hand; and, by his flushed countenance, vacant stare, and unsteady walk, he was evidently in a pretty advanced state of intoxication. In fact—and there is no necessity to disguise the matter—the pious minister had sat up to enjoy himself alone; and he had carried his libations to such an extent that he was now, at two o'clock in the morning, most awfully drunk.

The moment Lord William caught sight of the inebriate minister, he sprang upon him—placed his hand tightly over his mouth—and, thrusting him back into the supper-room, said in a low but hasty and threatening tone, “More hence at your peril!”

He then closed and locked the door.

But in the short and decided scuffle an untoward accident had occurred.

The candlestick had dropped from Mr. Sheepshanks' hand on the marble floor of the hall; and the consequence was that the porter sprang up, and was out of bed in a trice.

Sir Gilbert Heathcote rushed upon him: but not in time to prevent the man from springing a huge rattle and crying, “Help! help!”

Lord William Trevelyan hesitated not a moment how to act. He darted to the truckle-bed—seized the keys from beneath the pillow—and sprang to the door, leaving Sir Gilbert Heathcote wrestling desperately with the porter.

The reader will remember that there were two doors; and the young nobleman had only just time to open the first or inner one, when a rapid glance cast behind showed him his friend Sir Gilbert upon the floor, completely overpowered by the huge porter, who had placed his knee upon the baronet's chest.

It was Trevelyan's hope that his friend would have been able to keep the porter engaged in the struggle until he could have opened both the doors, when he would have turned to the scene of strife, to rescue the baronet; but scarcely had he observed that Sir Gilbert was already vanquished, when four of the keepers rushed down stairs into the hall.

With the rapidity and force of a tiger springing upon its prey, Lord William rushed on the huge porter, hurled him to a distance, and raised up the prostrate baronet.

All this was the work of an instant: but in another moment the keepers sprang upon the two friends, and closed with them.

The baronet was again borne down; but Trevelyan, who now saw that the conflict was really becoming desperate, used the bunch of heavy door-keys with such effect that he speedily disabled the two keepers who had assailed him,—stretching one senseless on the floor, and compelling the other to beat a retreat with the blood pouring down his face.

To turn his attention to the two men who were dragging away Sir Gilbert Heathcote, was the intrepid young nobleman's next step; and in a few moments the baronet, once more rescued from the enemy, was by the side of his intrepid friend.

“Take the keys and open the front door!” cried Trevelyan, impetuously pushing Sir Gilbert towards that extremity of the hall where the means of egress lay. “Escape, in the name of heaven!—think not of me!”

And having thrust the keys into his friend's hand, Lord William seized the Doctor's gold-headed cane, which hung to a hat-peg in the hall; and placing himself between the front-door and the keepers, he cried, “Beware how you provoke me—for I shall not hesitate to defend myself to the death!”

But scarcely were these words uttered, when the two keepers from whom he had rescued the baronet, returned to the charge, aided by the burly porter.

The foremost was instantaneously felled by a blow vigorously dealt with the cane; and, following up his advantage quickly as the eye can wink, Trevelyan darted at the other keeper, whom he also levelled on the spot. But in the next moment the gallant young nobleman was in the grasp of the porter; and, dropping the cane as no longer useful in a close tussle, he addressed himself with all his might to this last and most desperate single combat.

The scene was very exciting; and all that we have yet described since the first moment that the conflict commenced, did not occupy more than two minutes.

Scarcely had the intrepid nobleman and the herculean porter closed together, when the Doctor, attired in his dressing-gown and slippers, and with his cotton night-cap on his head, appeared at the bottom of the stairs, holding a chamber-candle in his hand.

At the same instant Sir Gilbert Heathcote had succeeded in opening the front door; and the morning breeze poured into the hall, in a manner doubtless highly refreshing to the porter, who, be it remembered, had nothing on but his shirt—his cap having fallen off in the conflict which he had maintained with the baronet in the first instance.

Two of the discomfited keepers, animated by the presence of the Doctor—or perhaps rendered ashamed of their pusillanimity—now returned to the attack upon Trevelyan, who was just on the point of hurling the porter to the ground. But Sir Gilbert, having made the entrance free, rushed back to help his friend; and the contest was again renewed with desperate energy,—the other two keepers, who had by this time recovered their senses, joining in the struggle.

And hard would it have gone with Trevelyan and the baronet against such odds, had not two newcomers suddenly appeared upon the scene.

For, the front door standing wide open, and the lamp being alight in the hall, two gentlemen who were passing by the house at the time beheld the extraordinary proceedings that were taking place within; and the foremost, perceiving in an instant that the odds were two to five,—namely, Trevelyan, and the baronet against the four keepers and the porter,—exclaimed at the top of a stentorian voice, “Be Jusus! Frank, and we'll just give a helping hand to the waker side!”

With these words, the redoubtable Captain O'Blunderbuss—nerved with all the courage attributed by Sir Walter Scott to Lord Marmion—“plunged into the fight.”

Or, in less poetical language, he darted into the hall—levelled the herculean porter with a well-

directed blow between the eyes—and sent a couple of keepers sprawling over the aforesaid porter in an instant.

Frank Curtis, having imbibed just sufficient poteen to subdue his habitual cowardice and arm him with the bastard though not the less effectual valour which strong drink inspires, unhesitatingly followed the example of his gallant leader, and bore his part in the fray; so that in less than a minute a complete diversion was effected in favour of Lord William Trevelyan and Sir Gilbert Heathcote, the enemy being utterly discomfited.

"Villains! murderers! robbers!" shouted the infuriate Doctor, as loud as he could bawl; and then the screams and shrieks of the affrighted female servants were heard echoing from the stairs and landing-places.

"Let us depart!" cried Lord William Trevelyan; and, in a very few moments, he pushed the baronet, the captain, and Frank Curtis, out of the front door,—he himself pausing only for a single second to secure the keys.

In another instant he was outside the house; and closing the door behind him, he locked it so as to prevent the Doctor and his myrmidons from instituting an immediate pursuit.

"Be Jasus! and this is the rummest lar-r-k I ever had in all my life!" ejaculated Captain O'Blunderbuss, panting for breath.

"Come with us, gentlemen," said Lord William, hastily addressing that gallant officer and Frank Curtis: "you have rendered us a signal service—and we must know you better. We have likewise certain necessary explanations to give you relative to the strange scene in which you took so generous a part. But come away directly—there is not a moment to be lost—a hue and cry may be raised!"

"Be the power-rs! and is it bur-r-glars ye are?" cried the Captain, somewhat regretting the precipitation with which he had mixed himself up in the late affray.

"No—no: far from *that*!" exclaimed Lord William, laughing heartily at the idea. "But let us get as quickly as we can out of this neighbourhood."

And away the four gentlemen scampered into the Cambridge Road, down which they sped until they reached Mile End, where they fortunately found a night-cab waiting for a fare.

Into the vehicle they got; and Lord William Trevelyan exclaimed, as an instruction to the driver, "Park Square, Regent's Park!"

Away the cab went; and both Captain O'Blunderbuss and Frank Curtis, who had heard the aristocratic address thus given, were seized with an insatiable curiosity to learn who their new acquaintances could be.

CHAPTER CXC.

A SCENE IN A CAB.

"GINTHLEMEN," exclaimed the gallant Irishman, "I mane to introduce myself and frind to ye without any more bother or pother. My frind, then, ginthlemen, is Misther Frank Cur-r-tis—dis-cinded from a fine family, and once possissed of large estates, all of which, be Jasus! he's managed to ate up as clano as if dirthy acres were plum-pudding. My name, ginthlemen, is Capthain

O'Bluntherbuss, of Bluntherbuss Park, Connemara—where I shall be delighted to see ye any time ye may be afther visitting Ould Ireland and I'm at home."

"Permit me to shake hands with you, Captain O'Blunderbuss," said the young nobleman; "and with you also, Mr. Curtis. You have rendered me and my friend a service which we cannot easily forget."

"And which we shall never seek to forget," added the baronet, emphatically; and then there was a general shaking of hands inside the cab.

Lord William Trevelyan next proceeded to inform his new friends who he and Sir Gilbert Heathcote were; and the reader may conceive the huge delight experienced by Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Frank Curtis when they found themselves in the company of a real nobleman and a real baronet.

"And now, my lor-r-d," said the gallant officer, "will ye be so obleeging as to explain to us what house that was where all the pother took place, and what was the maning of the pother itself: for, be the holy poker-r! I can't make head or tail of it!"

"The fact is," responded Lord William Trevelyan, "it was a mad-house."

"A mad-house!" ejaculated Mr. Frank Curtis, starting as if stung by a serpent lurking in the straw at the bottom of the cab—while a cold tremor came over him; for it instantly struck him that he and his Irish companion had been instrumental in the escape of a couple of lunatics.

"A mad-house!" repeated the Captain, immediately entertaining the same idea, although not sharing the apprehensions of his friend.

"Neither more nor less," continued Trevelyan, perfectly unaware of the impression which his words had produced upon the two gentlemen: for, as the inside of the cab was quite dark, he could not observe the change that took place in their countenances.

"You—you—don't mean to—to—say," stammered Curtis, fidgetting uncommonly, and thrusting his hand outside the window to grasp the handle of the door: for he began to think that the sooner he emancipated himself from the cab, the better;—"you—you—"

"Hould your tongue, ye spalpeen!" vociferated the Captain, who, fully acquainted with the character of his friend, guessed pretty accurately all that was passing in his mind: for the worthy Irishman, on his part, was determined not to separate from his new friends, whether they were lunatics or not, until he had ascertained if any thing was to be got out of them either in the shape of money or whiskey, or both;—"hould your tongue, ye spalpeen! and let's hear what his lor-rdship has to say upon the matther."

"Well, as I was informing you, gentlemen," resumed Trevelyan, who considered that a proper explanation was fully due to those who had acted such a gallant part in the late proceedings, "the house whence you just now so effectually aided us to escape, is a lunatic-asylum—and the men against whom you fought were the keepers."

"And who—who were the—the—lunatics?" asked Frank Curtis, perspiring at every pore—for the effects of the whiskey which he had been drinking were completely absorbed in the terror that now influenced him.

"Be Jasus! and I won't have such questions

put to my intimate friend his lor-r-dship, and my particular friend the baronet!" ejaculated Captain O'Blunderbuss, bestowing upon Frank's ribs such an unmerciful nudge with his elbow that the gentleman who was made the recipient of the said poke writhed horribly in his seat. "Prosade, sir—my lor-r-d, I mane," added the gallant officer, who, in spite of his civility towards the nobleman and the baronet, firmly believed that they were lunatics, and had usurped titles to which they had not the slightest claim nor right.

"Your companion asked me who were the lunatics," said Trevelyan, beginning to be somewhat astonished at the manner of his new friends: "well, to tell you the candid truth, myself and Sir Gilbert Heathcote were supposed to be—although I leave you both to judge whether there could have been the slightest ground for such an idea."

"O Lord!—O Lord!" murmured Frank Curtis; and again his hand, which he had withdrawn when the captain nudged him, was thrust out of the window to grasp the door-latch.

"Are you unwell, my dear sir?" inquired Sir Gilbert Heathcote, in a tone of much concern—for, being seated precisely opposite to Curtis, he had heard the murmured ejaculations which had escaped that individual's lips.

"Yes—very," replied Frank, with a hollow groan.

"Be asy, thin, can't ye?" whispered the Captain savagely in his ear, at the same time favouring him with another barbarous nudge in the ribs. "Oh! it's nothin' at all, at all, with my friend, I can assure ye, my lor-r-d and Sir Gilbert," exclaimed the gallant officer aloud: "he's throubled with whaz-ing in the throat when he's been afther dhrinking an extra dhrup of potheen—and may be the motion of the cab don't quite agree with him, bad luck to his nonsense! Well, my lor-r-d, ye were afther telling us that your lor-r-dship's ownself and Sir Gilbert were belaved to be the lunatics?"

"Just so," answered Trevelyan; "and had not the affair proved a very serious one to my friend Heathcote, I should be inclined to laugh at the ludicrous manner in which it terminated. Heathcote was immured in that asylum under most treacherous circumstances a short time ago—although, I need scarcely inform you, there was not the slightest pretence for the imputation of insanity—"

"Be the holy poker-r! and any one that's blind could see that same!" ejaculated Captain O'Blunderbuss.

"O Lord!" again moaned Frank Curtis; and he silyly and stealthily turned the handle of the cab door.

"Determined to rescue my friend," continued Lord William Trevelyan, "I induced two medical gentlemen, who are under some obligations to me, and whom I admitted into my confidence, to sign the necessary certificates to consign me to a lunatic asylum—"

"O Lord—O Lord!" groaned Curtis, more deeply than before; for even if he had hitherto entertained any doubt as to the state of Trevelyan's mind, the singular avowment just made was quite sufficient to confirm him in the opinion that he was in company with a decided lunatic.

"Whar the divvel ails ye, man?" growled Captain O'Blunderbuss. "Prosade, my lor-r-d, I'm dapehly interhersted in your lor-r-dship's narrative."

"Hying thus obtained the certificates," continued Trevelyan, "I tutored my valet how to act

—and he accordingly consigned me to the care of Dr. Swinton—the old gentleman whom you saw in a dressing-gown and night-cap at the foot of the stairs."

"An arrant ould scounthrel, I've no doubt," interjected the Captain.

"It was necessary, under the circumstances," resumed Trevelyan, "to fight Sir Gilbert's enemies with their own weapons. Cunning against cunning—duplicity against duplicity! That was the plan I adopted; and I affected insanity so well, that the Doctor was completely deceived."

"Be the power-rs! this is excellent," ejaculated Captain O'Blunderbuss. "It's not ivery one that could desayve a mad-doctor so well."

"I really believe that he imagined me to be as mad as a March hare," said Trevelyan.

"And so you are!" yelled forth Frank Curtis, suddenly throwing the door wide open and making a desperate attempt to leap from the cab, even at the risk of breaking his neck or fracturing his skull—for his terrors had risen to such a pitch that confinement in the vehicle along with two persons whom he firmly believed to be downright mad-men, had become utterly unendurable—but the iron grasp of the Captain clutched him by the back part of his collar just as he was on the point of bounding frantically forth into the road—and he was compelled; not however without a struggle, to resume his seat.

This proceeding on the part of Frank Curtis suddenly opened the eyes of both Trevelyan and the baronet to the impressions which the recent proceedings had unmistakably and naturally made on the minds of their new friends: as if a light had darted in upon them, they now comprehended the cause of Frank Curtis's singular manner almost ever since they first entered the vehicle;—and they likewise perceived (though they did not rightly interpret) the courtesy which had not only rendered Captain O'Blunderbuss so good a listener to the explanations given by Trevelyan, but had also prompted him to silence and coerce his companion as much as possible.

Accordingly, Trevelyan and Sir Gilbert Heathcote simultaneously broke out into such a hearty fit of laughter that Frank Curtis began to console himself with the idea that they were at least harmless; while Captain O'Blunderbuss set them down as the merriest lunatics he had ever encountered in all his life, and joined with unfeigned cordiality in their glee.

"And so you really thought that we were mad?" exclaimed Trevelyan, as soon as he could compose himself sufficiently to speak.

"Oh! not at all, at all!" cried the Captain.

"But Mr. Curtis firmly believes that we are neither more nor less than lunatics?" said the young nobleman, enjoying the scene.

"Be Jasus! and if he darrs insult your lor-r-dship and your lor-r-d's friend by even suspecting such a thing, he shall . . . tomorrow mornin' at twelve paces on W . . . on Common!" exclaimed the gallant and warlike gentleman.

"Really you excite yourself too much in our behalf, Captain," observed Trevelyan, who saw plainly enough that O'Blunderbuss was adopting just such a tone and manner as one would use to conciliate and soothe lunatics. "Now tell us the truth, my dear sir," continued the young nobleman: "do you not think that if we are actually and positively

crazy, you and Mr. Curtis cannot boast of being perfectly sane?"

"Be Jasus! and that same is precisely what I've often been afther thinking!" cried the Captain, determined to humour the supposed lunatics as much as possible. "As for Frank Curthis here, he's as mad as the Irish pig that wouldn't go one particular way save and excipt at such times that it belaved it was being driv another. As for meself, bad luck to me! I'm not blind to my own failings—and I know purty well that I'm as cracked as any damned ould laky tay-kettle."

The accommodating humour of Captain O'Blunderbuss, who unhesitatingly pronounced himself and his friend Mr. Curtis to be insane, under the impression that such an admission would prove highly gratifying to those to whom it was made, produced such an effect upon the young nobleman and the baronet, that they became almost convulsed with laughter: and it was indeed fortunate that this scene occurred, inasmuch as its extreme ludicrousness tended materially to raise the spirits of Sir Gilbert Heathcote after the wrongs he had suffered and the incarceration he had endured.

It is impossible to say how long the equivocal and the consequent hilarity would have lasted, had not the cab suddenly stopped in front of a handsome house in Park-square.

"Now," thought both Captain O'Blunderbuss and Frank Curtis at the same time, "we shall see the bubble burst very shortly; and it will transpire who our two mad friends really are."

The summons at the front-door was speedily answered by the appearance of Fitzgeorge in his plain clothes and a couple of footmen in livery, all of whom had waited up the whole night in expectation of the probable return of their master.

As for Fitzgeorge, he ran up to the door of the cab, and perceiving Sir Gilbert inside, exclaimed with unaffected delight, "Thank God! your lordship's scheme has proved triumphant!"

At these words Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Frank Curtis uttered involuntary ejaculations of astonishment: for they began to think that one of their new friends was really a nobleman after all, and that they might neither of them prove to be lunatics in the long run.

Leaping from the cab, Trevelyan invited the gallant gentleman and his companion to enter the house, observing, with a laugh, "However insane we may all be, we will at least exercise the common prudence of taking a little refreshment after all the hard work and momentous proceedings of the night."

In a few instants the Captain and Frank found themselves conducted into an elegantly furnished apartment, in the midst of which was a table laid out with costly plate, and spread with a cold repast consisting of dainties that made their mouths water even to gaze upon. It was likewise a source of great satisfaction to the two gentlemen to behold a buffet well stored with wine and spirits, amongst which latter the Captain had no difficulty in recognising some poteen of the real orthodox colour.

The nobleman and his guests took their seats at table, and did ample justice alike to viands and to wine. Indeed, it was amazingly refreshing to behold the appetite with which the Captain and Frank Curtis addressed themselves to the former, and the zest with which they partook of the latter. They no longer believed that either Trevelyan or Sir

Gilbert was mad; and when the former gave them the whole particulars of the story which he had only half finished in the cab, they laughed heartily at the misconceptions they had formed.

Under the influence of the poteen, which was duly produced after supper,—if supper such a meal could be called, as it was now long past three o'clock in the morning,—the Captain and Frank Curtis became particularly talkative; when it appeared that, existing under grievous apprehensions of certain formidable beings denominated "sheriff's officers," they had hired lodgings in the classic region of Globe Town, and that, having spent the evening and best portion of the night at a public-house in the Hackney Road, they were taking a short cut homeward, past the Doctor's house, when they became the witnesses of the scene wherein they immediately after bore so distinguished a part.

From these and other revelations, which the Captain purposely suffered to ooze out as if quite unintentionally, Trevelyan and Sir Gilbert gleaned sufficient to convince them that their new friends were "gentlemen under a cloud;" and they were not sorry at having ascertained a fact which at once placed them in a position to testify their gratitude for the services of the night.

Accordingly, after exchanging a few words in a low tone with Sir Gilbert, Lord William Trevelyan wrote something upon a slip of paper, and then addressed Captain O'Blunderbuss and Frank Curtis in the following manner:—

"You will pardon me, my friends, for the liberty I am about to take and the observations I am on the point of offering. But it has struck Sir Gilbert Heathcote and myself, from certain words which fell from your lips in the excitement of convivial discourse, that you have experienced some little disappointment respecting the arrival of remittances; and we shall be alike honoured and rejoiced if you will permit us to use the freedom of friends under such circumstances. It is probable that a few hundreds may be of some trifling service to you at this moment; and it will prove a source of unfeigned delight to Sir Gilbert and myself if, in return for the generous aid you afforded us, we can in any way relieve you from a temporary inconvenience."

Thus speaking, Lord William handed the slip of paper to Captain O'Blunderbuss, who, hastily glancing at it as he folded it up preparatory to consignment to his pocket, observed that it was a cheque for five hundred pounds.

"Be Jasus! my dear frinds," he exclaimed, addressing himself to the young nobleman and the baronet, "ye do things in such a handsome way that I don't know how to expriss my thanks at all, at all. Curthis, ye spalpeen!" he cried, suddenly turning round upon his companion, "why the divvel don't ye jine in making a spache on the occasion?—since n.y lor-r-d and Sir Gilbert have lint us five hunthred pounds to relave us from our temporary difficulties. But I'll unthertake to repay that same, my frinds," he continued, again addressing his words directly to Trevelyan and Heathcote, "the moment I resave my rints from Ould Ir-reland—and bad luck to 'em! So here's afther wishing us succiss—and be damned to all mad-docthors, say I!"

Having achieved this beautiful peroration, Captain O'Blunderbuss tossed off at a single draught the entire contents of a large tumbler of falding toddy, and then rose to take his departure.

Frank Curtis, who was in a most glorious state of mental obfuscation—beholding two Trevelyan, two baronets, two captains, and heaven only knows how many wax-candles—was with some difficulty induced to stand upon his legs; and his Irish friend was more troubled still to make him use the aforesaid legs when he did get upon them. However, after some little persuasion and more threatening on the part of the Captain, Frank Curtis suffered himself to be led forth from the hospitable mansion.

As soon as Trevelyan and Sir Gilbert Heathcote were alone, the former related to his friend the particulars of the various interviews which had taken place between himself and Mrs. Sefton—that lady's discovery of her daughter Agnes—and her removal to the villa at Bayswater.

The baronet was profoundly agitated—but it was with mingled surprise and joy—when he heard those tidings relative to Agnes: he rose and paced the room with uneven steps,—and then, reseating himself, appeared anxious to make certain revelations—or rather, unbosom his mind to his young friend. But, feeling perhaps unequal to the task at that moment, after the long hours of excitement through which he had just passed, he said, abruptly, "Trevelyan, I have matters of importance to confide to you: but it shall be for another occasion! I must now leave you—'tis nearly five o'clock—the morning has dawned some time—and I am impatient to repair to the villa at Bayswater."

"Will you not take an hour's repose before you depart?" inquired Lord William Trevelyan.

"Oh! I could not close my eyes in sleep again until I have embraced those who— But pardon me for this excitement—this agitation," exclaimed Sir Gilbert, interrupting himself suddenly. "Tomorrow I will tell you all—everything," he added, pressing Trevelyan's hand warmly: "and then you will better comprehend the feelings which move me now. Farewell, my dear friend, for the present."

Sir Gilbert was about to take his departure, when Fitzgeorge entered the room, and addressing himself to his master, said, "My lord, I had forgotten to inform your lordship that when I returned hither last evening, after leaving you at Dr. Swinton's, I found the Marquis of Delmour waiting—"

"The Marquis of Delmour!" ejaculated Sir Gilbert Heathcote.

"Yes, sir," replied Fitzgeorge. "The Marquis appeared to be in a very excited state, and was most anxious to see your lordship," continued the valet, again addressing himself to his master. "I assured him that your lordship was gone out of town, and might not return for a day or two—whereupon he almost flew into a rage with me for giving him such information. He paced the room in great agitation, and asked me several questions relative to any ladies who might visit at the mansion: but I answered that your lordship was not accustomed to receive visitresses at all. At length he took his departure, stating that he should call again in the morning at ten o'clock, and take his chance of finding your lordship at home."

"I understand full well the meaning of this visit on the part of the Marquis," said Sir Gilbert Heathcote to Trevelyan, when the valet had retired; "but I have not time for explanations now. My impatience to repair to Bayswater is intense, unseasonable though the hour is for arousing ladies from their

slumbers. One request I have, however, to make, my dear Trevelyan," added the baronet; "and this is, that you will not, under any circumstances, communicate to the Marquis of Delmour the address of the villa occupied by Mrs. Sefton and Agnes."

"Be well assured, my dear friend," answered the young nobleman, "that the secret is safe with me."

The baronet wrung Trevelyan's hand with the cordial warmth of deep gratitude and sincere attachment, and then took his departure.

Lord William lay down for a few hours, and enjoyed a sound slumber until nine o'clock, when he rose and dressed himself to receive the Marquis of Delmour.

Punctually as the clock struck ten, a handsome carriage drove up to the door; and the Marquis, hastily alighting, was immediately conducted into the drawing-room where Trevelyan awaited his presence.

CHAPTER CXCI.

THE OLD MARQUIS AND THE YOUNG LORD.

"My lord, you are a man of honour, I have heard," began the Marquis, without any prefatory observations; "and I feel assured that you will at once relieve me from a most painful state of suspense. Pardon the excitement which I display—and justify the good opinion I have conceived of you by giving me without delay the information I am about to seek. In a word, where is Agnes—my daughter Agnes—the young lady whom you have seen walking in the garden of the secluded cottage near Norwood?"

"Is that beautiful creature indeed your lordship's daughter?" exclaimed Trevelyan, not altogether surprised at the announcement: for the agitation which Sir Gilbert Heathcote had shown when the name of the Marquis of Delmour was mentioned, and the request which he had made to the effect that the residence of Mrs. Sefton should be kept secret, had already created in the mind of Lord William a suspicion of the real truth.

"Yes—Agnes is indeed my daughter—and I am proud of her!" cried the Marquis. "But I know that she was inveigled away from the cottage by one who—by her own mother, in fine—and I am likewise aware that you subsequently entrusted her to the care of a lady of your acquaintance. This latter information I obtained from a certain Mrs. Mortimer—"

"The information was correct, my lord," answered Trevelyan. "And now I must candidly confess that I have a very difficult part to perform: for I will not condescend to a falsehood—and I dare not reveal the truth. This much, however, I unhesitatingly declare—that, by a singular coincidence, the lady to whom I conducted your lordship's daughter proved to be none other than her mother."

"Her mother! then she is at this moment in the care of that woman?" ejaculated the Marquis, his excitement increasing: "and you will not tell me where I can find them?"

"That is the truth which, as I said ere now, I dare not repeat," responded Trevelyan, profoundly touched by the evident grief of the old nobleman.

"Will you be the means of separating a father from his child?" asked the Marquis, now sinking



through exhaustion upon a sofa—for hitherto he had remained standing, although Trevelyan had twice courteously indicated the chair that had been placed for his accommodation.

"Were I to yield to your lordship's desire," said the young nobleman,—*"were I to give you the address of—of—"*

"Call *her* Mrs. Sefton, if you will," interrupted the Marquis, bitterly: "I know that she passes and has long passed under that name."

"Well, my lord—were I to give you the address of that lady," resumed Trevelyan, "I should be adopting a course calculated to separate a mother from her child."

"But that mother is unworthy of being entrusted with the care of her daughter!" exclaimed the Marquis of Delmour, emphatically.

"My lord, I have not the slightest inclination to enter into matters of a private nature, and regarding your own family," said Trevelyan, with firmness, yet courtesy—and even with commiseration for the sorrow of the old noble: "much less," he added, "should I like to be constituted a judge between

your lordship and the Marchioness of Delmour—for such I presume Mrs. Sefton to be."

"Without placing your lordship in any disagreeable or invidious position," said the Marquis, growing more tranquil as his naturally powerful mind suggested the utter inutility of giving way to excitement, "I may yet address you not only in your capacity of a nobleman endowed with high intelligence and strict notions of integrity, but also as one who—unless I be much deceived—experiences an honourable passion for my daughter. Ah! I perceive by your countenance that such indeed is the sentiment you entertain for Agnes: and now, therefore, as her father will I address you—as her parent, her protector, and her natural guardian, I invoke your attention."

"It would be disrespectful alike to your age and rank, and also to your position as the father of her whom I sincerely and devotedly love, were I to refuse to hear whatever your lordship may have to communicate," said Trevelyan, after a few moments reflection.

"Thanks—a thousand thanks!" ejaculated the

Marquis: "I shall yet move you in my favour! But tell me—you are acquainted with one whom, if you please, we will continue to call Mrs. Seften: has she ever communicated to you any particulars of her earlier life?"

"Frankly and candidly," replied the young nobleman, "she has confided to me a portion of those particulars; and I have this day learnt sufficient to fill up the few blanks which she left in her narrative."

"You know, then," resumed his lordship, "that I wedded her against her consent: but I knew not at the time—as God is my judge!—that I was so completely sealing her misery by that marriage. Sophia—that is her Christian name—was young and beautiful when I first saw her—Oh! so beautiful that I became madly in love with her: and you may perhaps be aware that love is selfish—claiming its object at any price, and at any sacrifice. Her father was in deep pecuniary difficulties—nay, more—he had done things which would have dishonoured his name and even endangered his personal safety. I had an enormous fortune at my command—I told him that I adored his daughter—and he promised me her hand. On that occasion he concealed from me the fact that the young lady's affections were already engaged: indeed, he assured me that love was as yet a stranger to her bosom, but that she had been struck by my appearance, although I was so much her senior. The duplicity of the father was the first fault in that long chain of unpleasant circumstances and untoward incidents: and, relying on all that he had thus told me, I at once advanced a hundred thousand pounds to relieve him from his embarrassments. Soon, however, did I begin to perceive that my visits were rather tolerated than encouraged by his charming daughter Sophia; and then I learnt—but not from her lips—that she loved another. I felt indignant with the father—while I passionately coveted the daughter; and under the influence of those feelings I pressed my suit. I was resolved not to be made a dupe by the sire, and sacrificed by the young lady to a rival. Had she herself frankly and candidly revealed to me the state of her affections—thrown herself upon my mercy—appealed to my honour, I should have acted a generous part, my lord—yes—I should have been generous!"

"But the young lady was coerced by her father, who intimidated her at one time and ridiculed her at another," observed Trevelyan: "I remember full well that she told me of her sire's unfeeling conduct towards her."

"Yes—and to me also she made the same revelation, when it was too late," continued the Marquis. "However, it was under such inauspicious circumstances that our marriage took place; and again I appeal to heaven to attest the truth of my words when I declare that I treated her with all possible tenderness, affection, and regard."

"She has done your lordship that justice in narrating those particulars to me," remarked Trevelyan.

"But I could not render her happy," resumed the Marquis: "she was constantly weeping—and our honeymoon resembled an interval of mourning after a funeral, rather than a season of felicity succeeding a bridal. Much as I exerted myself to please her—wish as I was with money to procure her the means of recreation and enjoyment—profuse as I became with the most costly gifts, not only to her-

self but likewise to all her relatives and friends, I could never win a smile from her lips. Now your lordship will admit that this was more than an unpleasant life to lead—it was absolutely wretched. But your lordship may conceive the deep vexation which I experienced when, having succeeded on one occasion in inducing the Marchioness to appear at a ball given by some friends, I saw her pale countenance suddenly glow with animation and her eyes light up with joy as Gilbert Heathcote advanced to solicit her hand for a quadrille. And she smiled, too—yes, she smiled—and, oh! how sweetly upon him, as her elegant figure moved with dignity and grace in the mazy dance. My soul seemed as if it were withering up within me: I am confident that I must have eyed them with the ferocity of a lynx. But Sophia appeared to have forgotten that I was present—that there was such a being in the world as I: her whole attention was devoted to my rival—her whole thoughts were absorbed in the pleasure of his society. She danced with him more than once—she sat next to him at the supper-table—and after the banquet she waltzed with him. I have ever detested that voluptuous—that licentious—that indecent dance: but how I loathed—oh! how I loathed it on this occasion! I tore myself away from the ball-room, and sought a secluded corner in the card-room. There I endeavoured to reason with myself upon the absurdity of my jealous rage—of the ridicule to which any manifestation of the feeling would expose me—and of the contempt I should inevitably draw down upon myself from my wife; did I allow her to perceive how much I was annoyed at what she would doubtless consider a trivial matter. Thus exercising a powerful command over my emotions, I even assumed a smiling countenance when we returned home, and when I congratulated her upon having been in such high spirits. But all her coldness and inanimation had come back, and I thought within myself that she would not appear thus if Gilbert Heathcote were still in her society."

"My lord, pardon me—but wherefore enter into details which only arouse reminiscences so painful to yourself?" interrupted Trevelyan.

"Bear with me yet a little while," said the Marquis, speaking in so mild and plaintive a tone that Lord William could not find it in his heart to manifest any impatience or any farther disinclination to hear the old nobleman's narrative: "bear with me, I say—for I have a motive in entering into these details," he continued. "At the same time, I will not be too prolix, although there are a thousand little circumstances which recur to my memory, and which might be quoted to prove how patient and enduring I was under the cruel indifference wherewith I was treated. But I will content myself by observing that Sophia smiled only on those occasions when she encountered Gilbert Heathcote in society or in the fashionable promenade: at other times she shrouded herself in a species of dreamy apathy. Her father, perceiving when it was too late how utterly he had wrecked his daughter's happiness, died of a broken heart: but, strange to say, it was not long after this event that Sophia appeared suddenly to rally a little and seek a more active existence. She began to take frequent airings in the carriage—grew addicted to shopping—accepted every invitation that was sent for balls, routs, card-parties, and concerts—and requested me to take a box at the Opera: in fine, she

speedily plunged into the routine of fashionable dissipation. Nevertheless, when alone with me, she was ever cold and reserved—if not positively sullen and morose. In the course of time she was in the way to become a mother—and I hoped that the birth of a child might subdue a portion of her coldness towards me, even if the tie were not strong enough to induce her to love me. But when Agnes—my darling Agnes—was born, her manner varied not one tittle in respect to myself. Time passed on—and at last I began to entertain serious suspicions of the fidelity of my wife—for I found that she had frequent interviews, not altogether accidental, with Sir Gilbert Heathcote, who about that time succeeded to a baronetcy and a tolerable fortune. I remonstrated with the Marchioness upon her imprudence—to give her conduct no harsher name; and then began a series of quarrels, disputes and bickerings, which made my life more wretched than ever. On one of those occasions she reproached me for having married her—and she declared that she never had loved, and never could love me. Alas! I know it but too well,—knew also that she *had* loved, and *still* loved another! And it was likewise after one of those disputes to which I have alluded that a horrible suspicion first entered my mind—a suspicion that the Marchioness had been unfaithful to me, and that Agnes was not my own child."

"Oh! my lord—continue this painful narrative no farther!" exclaimed Trevelyan. "It shocks me to be thus made the depositary of secrets of so delicate a nature!"

"Again do I implore your patience, Lord William," cried the Marquis: "and as I have advanced thus far in my sad story, permit me to carry it on to the conclusion. I was observing, then, that a dreadful suspicion seized upon me—and yet I dared not accuse my wife of incontinency. *She* divined what was passing in the depths of my tortured soul—*she* conjectured the nature of the apprehension which now began to haunt me like a ghost! Oh! how I longed to question her—to know the worst—or to hear her proclaim the injustice of my suspicion: but, no—I dared not touch upon the subject—my tongue clave to the roof of my mouth whenever I sought to frame the words that should accuse her. And in this manner did we drag on a wretched existence,—I experiencing all the misery of having a young wife who could not love me—and she feeling all the bitterness of her position in being allied to an old husband who had grown so jealous and so suspicious. At last the day came when all my repugnance to utter the fatal accusation suddenly vanished. I had been more than ordinarily provoked—for at a *dejeuner* given at the house of some friends, the Marchioness received with such evident satisfaction the marked attentions of Sir Gilbert Heathcote, that I felt myself insulted and outraged in the presence of the entire company. Accordingly, when we returned home in the afternoon, a violent scene took place between the Marchioness and myself; and it was then that, in a paroxysm of rage, I proclaimed the suspicion which I had for some time cherished—I accused her of infidelity—I revealed the doubt which existed in my mind relative to my paternal claims to the affections of the infant Agnes. Never—never shall I forget that memorable day! The Marchioness heard me—gazed on me fixedly—appeared stupefied and astounded for nearly a minute,—while her

countenance became pale as marble—her lips quivered—and her bosom heaved convulsively. I was terrified at her manner—she appeared at that moment to be *Injured Innocence* personified—I could have thrown myself at her feet and implored her pardon! But, in a thick and hollow voice, she said, '*All is now at an end, my lord, between you and me! We part—for ever!*'—A dizziness came over me—I felt that I had done wrong—that I had gone too far,—and I would have given worlds to be able to recall the fatal accusation! For I was now as firmly convinced of her innocence, as I had a few minutes before been deeply imbued with suspicion;—and I cursed—I anathematised the rashness that had marked my conduct. It was a painful—a distressing scene: for I remember that I fell upon my knees to implore her forgiveness—to beseech her to remain, if not for my sake, at least for that of the child. But this appeal only excited her the more: and when I adjured her in the name of her infant daughter to stay, she uttered a wild cry and fled, as if suddenly seized with insanity, from the house."

Here the Marquis paused for a few moments, and passed his handkerchief rapidly over his eyes:—the reminiscences of the past were still powerful enough to move him to tears!

"I shall not now detain you long, my lord," he resumed. "Whither my wife went, I knew not;—but in a short time I heard that she was living in the strictest seclusion and under a feigned name. Will you not despise me when you learn that I employed a spy to watch her actions—to institute inquiries concerning her pursuits and her conduct? But I will conceal nothing from you—and I candidly admit that such was the course which I adopted: for, though I still believed that she was innocent up to the time when my abrupt accusation drove her from the house, I nevertheless naturally conjectured that, on thus quitting me, she had sought the protection of him whom she loved. I was not therefore surprised to hear that Sir Gilbert Heathcote was a frequent visitor at the abode of Mrs. Soften—by which name she was now known:—but I was unable to glean any positive evidence of criminality on her part. And did I seek such evidence? Yes—for a raging jealousy had taken possession of me; and I longed to punish *her* for daring to love my rival as she did! But as time passed on and sober reflection worked its influence upon me, I grew ashamed of the course I had adopted—and I now resolved to hush up to the utmost of my power the unhappy position in which I stood with regard to my wife. For I already felt deeply attached to my little daughter—and I determined that, if human precautions could prevent such a misfortune, she should never have to blush for a mother's shame. I was strengthened in this resolve by the fact that the Marchioness herself was disposed to shroud the past in secrecy as much as possible: else wherefore the feigned name which she had adopted, and the seclusion in which she dwelt? But in the course of a few months certain events transpired which threatened to lay bare to the public the whole of this most painful history. I must explain myself more fully by stating that my wife's father had made a will leaving some landed property to me, and which was to descend to the child or children that might spring from my marriage with his daughter. A distant male relative of his now set up a claim to that property; and proceed-

ings were taken in the Court of Chancery, from which it transpired that the Marquis and Marchioness of Delmour were living apart—by mutual consent, as it was alleged—and that their infant child was in the charge of the Marquis himself. I shall not weary you with particulars nor details: suffice it to say that the proceedings took such a turn and were of such a nature as to lead to a decree to this effect—that the claims of the distant relative were rejected—that trustees were appointed by the Court to administer the property, until Agnes should attain the age of twenty-one—and that, as no allegation of misconduct had been made against the Marchioness of Delmour, she should have the charge of her daughter!”

This portion of the Marquis's narrative will explain to the reader wherefore, when conversing with his daughter at the cottage, as detailed in Chapter CLXI., he said to her, “Two years more, and I shall no longer have any secrets from you.” because at the expiration of that period, Agnes would attain her majority. The decree in Chancery likewise explained the ground upon which Mrs. Sefton—*alias* the Marchioness of Delmour—had observed to Trevelyan, in Chapter CLXXXI., that “the law was in her favour,” in respect to any endeavour that might be made to wrest Agnes from her care; and the same fact elucidates the meaning of her ladyship's remark that two years must elapse ere she could venture to dispose of the hand of her daughter in marriage.

“Thus was it,” resumed the Marquis, after a brief pause, “that those accursed proceedings which I did not provoke, and which, when once commenced, I could not arrest,—thus was it that they suddenly placed my infant daughter within the jurisdiction of the Chancery Court, and deprived me of the right of retaining her in my care. It is true that I might have instituted counter-proceedings in respect to this portion of the decree: but then I should have been compelled to attack the reputation of my wife—prove her to be an adulteress, if such evidence could be acquired—and cover a noble family with shame, while a species of hereditary taint would cling to the reputation of my Agnes. Now, my lord, you can understand my motive in rearing her under circumstances of such privacy—such secrecy,—in dooming her to an existence of seclusion—almost of solitude,—and of adopting all possible precautions to prevent her falling into the hands of her mother. And now, also, that you are acquainted with this most sad—this most unhappy history, I appeal to you whether you will be the means of permitting the innocent Agnes to remain in the care of her unworthy parent. If you really love her, my lord—if you propose to make her your wife when she attains her majority—I put it to your honour and to your good sense whether it be preferable that she should pass the interval of two years with her mother, who occupies so equivocal a position—or with her father, who has ever done his duty towards her.”

Trevelyan was cruelly embarrassed by this appeal, which in reality carried so much weight with it and involved so important a point, that he knew not how to act. Much as he was disposed to make all possible allowances for Mrs. Sefton—as we had better continue to call her,—much as he pitied her in consequence of the wretched marriage into which she had been forced—and great as the excuse was for her connexion with Sir Gilbert Heathcote,—he

nevertheless could not avoid being shocked at the idea of the young creature whom he intended to make his wife, remaining in the maternal care.

His good sense and propriety of feeling naturally prompted him, therefore, to advocate the father's claim to the guardianship of Agnes. but on the other hand, the solemn pledge he had given to Sir Gilbert Heathcote, and likewise his confidence in the good principles of Mrs. Sefton, in spite of her equivocal position—all this forbade him to side at once with the Marquis. Yet how was he to remain neutral?—he who had such a deep and tender interest in the welfare of the lovely—the innocent—the artless Agnes!

While he was still hesitating what course to adopt, and walking up and down the room in an excited manner,—while, too, the Marquis of Delmour, who remained seated upon the sofa, was watching him with the most intense anxiety,—a loud double knock and ring at the front door startled both the noblemen.

“I will not receive any one at present!” exclaimed Trevelyan; and hastily opening the drawing-room door, he hurried out upon the landing, whence he was about to give instructions to the hall-porter to deny him to the visitor, whoever it might be.

But the front-door was already opened; and both the Marquis and Trevelyan heard the hall-porter observing, evidently in reply to a question that had been put to him—“His lordship is particularly engaged, madam, at the present moment: the Marquis of Delmour is with his lordship in the drawing-room.”

“The Marquis of Delmour—eh?” exclaimed a female voice, not unknown to either of the noblemen. “Oh! I am acquainted with the Marquis as well as with my friend Lord William—and I will therefore take the liberty of intruding upon them.”

Before the hall-porter could offer any farther objection, the obtrusive female brushed past him and hurried up the marble staircase—Trevelyan having already retreated into the drawing-room.

In a few moments the young nobleman and the Marquis were equally annoyed by the appearance of Mrs. Mortimer, who, decked out in the gayest style, thus unceremoniously forced her way into their presence.

CHAPTER CXCII.

MRS. MORTIMER IN LONDON AGAIN.

“THIS is really most fortunate, my lords!” exclaimed the old woman, as she entered with a smirking countenance and a self-sufficient air. “I wished to see you both as early as convenient this morning—and, behold! I find you together. How is the pretty Agnes? Has not your lordship discovered that I told you the truth, when I referred you to this house for information respecting her?” she inquired, turning towards the Marquis.

“Yes, madam,” he exclaimed, hastily: “and as I shall proceed direct hence to my bankers, to instruct them relative to certain cheques which I recently gave in Paris, you may present your draft in the course of the day with the certainty of receiving the amount. I presume that it was for this purpose you desired to see me!”

“Precisely so, my lord,” responded the old woman scarcely able to conceal the boundless joy which she

now experienced: for the Marquis had given her precisely the very information which she was anxious to obtain—namely, *that his banker would in the course of the day be directed to cash the various cheques he had recently given when in Paris!*

"And what business can you possibly have to transact with me, madam?" demanded Lord William Trevelyan, in a tone of the most chilling hauteur.

"I thought of doing your lordship a service," answered Mrs. Mortimer; "and yet the manner in which I am received, is but a sorry recompense for my good intentions."

"To speak candidly, madam," said the young noble, "I mistrust your intentions and do not require your services."

"It is true enough that the presence of the Marquis here has forestalled the purport of my own visit," observed Mrs. Mortimer, secretly enjoying the vexation which she evidently caused Lord William by remaining in the room. "But I may as well prove to you that those intentions which you affect to mistrust, were really good; and therefore I will at once inform your lordship that I came to relate to you all that took place between the Marquis and me in Paris three days ago. For I thought that I might as well prepare you for a visit on the part of my Lord Delmour; and I was in hopes of being the first to reveal to you the high birth of the young lady whom you had believed to be plain *Agnes Vernon.*"

"For which officiousness you would have expected a handsome remuneration," said Lord William, with a contemptuous curling of the lip. "No—madam: you will not obtain a single guinea from me! I can read your character thoroughly—and, grieved as I am to be compelled to address a female in so harsh a manner, I must nevertheless beg you to relieve me of your presence as speedily as possible."

"I have no wish to intrude myself any longer upon your lordships," observed Mrs. Mortimer; and, with a respectful curtsy to the Marquis and a stiff inclination of the head to Trevelyan, she took her departure.

"And now, my lord," said the impatient Marquis, "that we are relieved of the company of that despicable woman—for in no other light can I regard her—may I solicit your decision in the important matter that yet remains to be settled?"

"It grieves me—believe me, my dear Marquis, it pains me to keep you in suspense," returned Trevelyan: "but on one side my inclination prompts me to act in accordance with your wishes—on the other, my word is pledged to retain the abode of—"

"Mrs. Sefton," interrupted the old nobleman, hastily.

"To retain the address of that lady a profound secret," added Trevelyan. "But this much I will promise—this much I will undertake:—without delay to repair to Mrs. Sefton and urge her to deliver up Lady Agnes to your care. I have that confidence in her rectitude of principle, which induces me to hope for success when I shall have placed the entire matter before her in its proper light."

"With this assurance I must rest contented for the present," observed the Marquis. "But hear the resolution to which I have come," he continued, rising from his seat, and speaking in a tone of excitement. "Hitherto I have done all I could—aye, and far

more than the generality of injured husbands would have done—to cast a veil over the unhappy circumstances which I have this morning related to you. But should she refuse to deliver up my daughter to my care—should she entrench herself behind the decision of the Chancery Court—I shall then remain peaceable no longer. It shall be war—open war—between her and me. I will appeal to the tribunals of my country—I will apply to the Ecclesiastical Court and the House of Lords for a divorce—and I will adopt the necessary proceedings and furnish the proper evidence to induce the Lord Chancellor to deprive the erring mother of the care of her child. Such is my determination, Lord William—and you may use the menace, which is no idle one, to bring that woman to reason."

With these words the Marquis pressed the hand of the young nobleman, and took his leave hastily.

Mrs. Mortimer, who was seated in a cab at a little distance, watching for the departure of the Marquis, beheld him enter his carriage, which immediately drove away; and the humbler vehicle was thereupon directed to follow the more imposing equipage.

The carriage proceeded into the Strand, and stopped at the door of an eminent banking-house, which the Marquis entered.

Mrs. Mortimer, having dogged him thither, alighted at a little distance and dismissed the cab.

She watched the old nobleman come forth again; and then she repaired to a coffee-house in the neighbourhood where she ordered some refreshment to be served up in a private room. She likewise demanded writing materials; and when she was left to herself, she drew forth the cheque for six hundred pounds which the Marquis of Delmour had given her.

"Now for the grand blow," she thought within herself, as she carefully examined the draft: "and it must be struck boldly, too! But the aim is worth all the risk:—sixty thousand pounds or transportation—those are the alternatives! I have been possessed of enough money in my life to know how sweet it is—and I have seen enough of transportation to be well aware how bitter it is! And the former is so sweet that it is worth while chancing all the bitters of the latter to obtain it. Besides—apart from the delicious feeling of having a vast fortune at my command—how delightful will it be to over-reach the haughty Perdita—or Laura, as she chooses to call herself!"

And here the old woman's lips curled into a contemptuous sneer.

"I have hitherto managed matters cleverly enough," she continued in her musings. "Ah! hah! Lord William Trevelyan thought that I called upon him either to gratify some idle curiosity or to extort money. He little suspected my drift! It was to see whether the Marquis had been to him—to learn whether my information had been found correct—to ascertain whether I might present the draft at the bankers'. And then the old Marquis himself!—it was lucky that I found him there—I was saved the trouble of calling at his mansion to worm out of him whether he had instructed his bankers to pay the cheque,—not my paltry draft for six hundred—but Perdita's grand amount of sixty thousand! In all this I succeeded admirably: and now for the desperate venture."

Having thus communed with herself, Mrs. Mortimer partook of a little refreshment; for, he was

anxious to while away an hour before she went to the bank, so as not to present herself too soon after the visit of the Marquis of Delmour to the establishment.

When she had eaten and drunk as much as she cared for she addressed herself to the grand project which she had in view, and in furtherance of which she had demanded the private room and the writing materials at the coffee-house.

The writing of the Marquis was execrably bad; and it was not a very difficult matter to add *ty* to the *six*, and transform the word *hundred* into *thousand*, in the body of the cheque; while the simple addition of 00 to the 600*l.* written in figures in the corner, completed the forgery.

The cheque, therefore, now stood for *sixty thousand pounds*, instead of *six hundred*, payable to *bearer*, no particular name being mentioned as the intended recipient.

When the old woman had thus transformed the document, a glow of triumph animated her hideous countenance; but in a few moments a chill—a cold, creeping tremor came over her—as if a clammy snake were gradually coiling itself around her form, underneath her clothes;—for she remembered all the sensations which she had experienced when she committed the forgery of Sir Henry Courtenay's name nineteen years previously!

By a desperate effort the old woman shook off the painful feeling that thus influenced her; and, resolving to allow herself no more leisure for reflection, *lest her thoughts should awake a coward of her*, she rang the bell—paid the trifling amount incurred—and took her departure from the coffee-house.

During her walk to the bank, which was close at hand, she rapidly calculated in her mind all the chances of success. The Marquis had unquestionably been thither to give instructions relative to the draft held by Laura as well as that which had been given to herself; and there was not the slightest reason to fear that her daughter had followed so closely on her steps from Paris as to have been able to visit the bank during the hour that had just elapsed. As for the excellence of the forgery—or rather of the alterations, Mrs. Mortimer entertained no apprehension on that score; and thus, all things considered, she deemed failure to be impossible.

With an apparent outward composure, but with a palpitating heart, the old woman entered the bank, and presented her cheque to one of the clerks. He surveyed it narrowly—took it into the private office, or parlour, doubtless to submit it to one of the proprietors of the establishment or some responsible person—and remained away upwards of two minutes.

Two minutes!—but that interval was an age—a perfect age in the imagination of the old woman! It was an interval composed of such intense feelings that the hair of a young person might have turned suddenly grey,—feelings of such burning hope and such awful suspense, of such profound terror and fervid expectation, that while molten lead appeared to drop upon one side of her heart, ice seemed to lay upon the other!

At length the clerk came back; and Mrs. Mortimer darted a rapid—searching—penetrating glance at his countenance.

Nothing save respect and civility could she trace there; and she instantly knew that she was safe!

Then came such a revulsion of feeling—such a

subsiding of the terrors and such an exaltation of the hopes which she had conceived—that it was as if she were shooting upwards from the profundity of a deluge of dark waters and suddenly breathed the fresh air again and beheld the bright sun and the smiling heavens overhead.

The clerk proceeded to count out bank-notes for the sum specified in the cheque; and as he handed the fortune—yes, literally a fortune—over to the old woman, he considerably gave her a caution to take care of the vile characters who frequently lurked about the doors of banking-houses.

Mrs. Mortimer thanked the clerk for his well-meant advice, and sallied forth from the establishment, with a heart so elate that she could scarcely believe in the success of the tremendous fraud, now that it had passed triumphantly through the ordeal.

But as she was crossing the threshold, she heard her name suddenly mentioned; and, hastily turning her head, she found herself face to face with Jack Rily, the Doctor!

CHAPTER CXIII.

JACK RILY AND MRS. MORTIMER.

THE individual whom Mrs. Mortimer thus unexpectedly and unpleasantly encountered, had made a considerable improvement in his personal appearance during the few days that had elapsed since she saw him last.

The old fur cap, the greasy velvet shooting-jacket, the rusty waistcoat, the corduroy trousers, and the heavy high-lows, were exchanged for a shining silk hat, a complete suit of black clothes, and a pair of Wellington boots; his shirt was likewise new and clean, and he wore a satin stock instead of the blue cotton handkerchief tied loosely round his neck.

He had evidently endeavoured to make himself look as respectable as he could; but the almost African hue of his complexion—the horrible hare-lip, through the opening of which the large white teeth glistened up to the gums—and the yellow fire that seemed to shine in the small and restless eyes, gave him such a peculiar aspect that it was scarcely possible for any one who passed to avoid noticing him.

"Mrs. Mortimer, my beloved tiger-cat, how are you?" he exclaimed, grasping the old woman's hand and shaking it violently.

"Very well, thank you, Mr. Rily; but pray do not detain me now, there's a good soul—for I have not a moment to spare."

"I shan't detain you, old beauty," interrupted Jack; "because I'll just do myself the pleasure of walking along with you. Come—take my arm—you needn't be ashamed to do so now: I think I'm pretty tidily rigged—eh?"

Thus speaking, he glanced complacently over his own person, and then bestowed a look upon the outward appearance of Mrs. Mortimer, who, as we have already observed, was dressed with unusual gaily.

"Come, my dear—take my arm," exclaimed the Doctor.

"Really, Mr. Rily, you must excuse me," said the old woman, who was most anxious to get away from the vicinity of the bank, but by no means desirous of remaining in the company of the Doctor.

"I have a particular matter to attend to immediately! If, however, you desire to see me, I shall be most happy to meet you this evening——"

"This fiddlestick!" interrupted Jack Rily, impatiently. "You know that you never kept the appointment you made with me after that Stamford Street affair the other day—when you went away with the young girl in the cab; and yet you assured me that there was money to be got through her——"

"Well, well—I have not time to talk of the matter now," said Mrs. Mortimer, angrily: "and I must take my leave of you."

"Lord bless you! I'm not going to be put off in this fashion, old lady," cried Jack. "It suits me to have a little further chat with you—and I'm determined the whim shall be gratified. So take my arm at once, and come along. If we stand here palavering, we shall soon have a mob about us—because it isn't every day that two such handsome people as you and I are seen together," he added, with a horrible chuckle.

"But perhaps you are not going my way," said Mrs. Mortimer, still hesitating to take the proffered arm, and deeply vexed at this encounter.

"Oh! yes I am—because I'll go any way you like," responded Jack Rily, in the most accommodating spirit.

"Well—you shall be my companion for a short time," exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer, affecting to laugh in good humour; and, taking his arm, she proceeded with him along the Strand.

"I met our friend Vitriol Bob last night at a public-house," observed Jack, who seemed quite proud of having the hideous old woman clinging to him. "He looked remarkably savage when he saw me in my bran new toggery—for he thought to himself that the money which purchased it ought to have belonged to him. I hadn't seen him since the night in Stamford Street; and, as he had the impudence to stare at me in a threatening manner, I went up to him and whispered in his ear, '*What about old Torrens, Bob?*' He turned quite livid with rage, and ground his teeth together; then, after a few moments' consideration, he said—also in a whisper—'*If it wasn't that you knew that secret, I'd serve you out nicely, old fellow: but I'll be even with you yet, I dare say.*'—'*Whenever you like, Bob,*' said I; and then we sat down in different parts of the room and stared at each other all the time we were smoking our pipes. But not another word passed between us; and the other people who were present, knowing that we were excellent pals until lately, wondered what the devil was the matter."

"And did he bury the dead body, do you know?" inquired Mrs. Mortimer.

"I didn't put the question to him," answered Jack Rily. "Nothing more passed between us than what I have just told you: but I have no doubt that he laid old Torrens two or three feet under the kitchen floor in the Haunted House. And now, how do you suppose that I and Vitriol Bob stand with regard to each other?"

"As enemies, I should suppose," replied Mrs. Mortimer, wondering by what means she could possibly shake off her disagreeable companion.

"As mortal—implacable—unrelenting enemies," continued the man, lowering his voice: for his loud talking had already attracted the notice of the passers-by in the Strand, and he had just caught

sight of a policeman who appeared to be eyeing him rather suspiciously. "Yes—as bitter enemies," he repeated. "Not that I have any resentment *now* against Bob: because my revenge is gratified, and I am more than even with him. But as he will take the first opportunity to thrust a knife into my ribs, or dash his vitriol bottle in my face, whenever he catches me in a lonely place,—why, I must be prepared to struggle with him to the very death. So, my old tiger-cat," added the Doctor, with amazing cheerfulness, considering the gravity of the topic, "whenever he and I do so meet, only one of us will walk away alive. That's as certain as that you're leaning on my arm, and that I'm proud of your company."

"Is Vitriol Bob, as you call him, such a desperate fellow?" inquired Mrs. Mortimer, wishing the Doctor at the hottest place she could think of.

"Why, I've told you all about him before," exclaimed Jack. "And now let me give you a little piece of advice about yourself, old gal——"

"About me!" repeated Mrs. Mortimer, with a shudder occasioned by a presentiment of what she was going to hear.

"Yes—about you, my tiger-cat," repeated the Doctor. "Remember that Vitriol Bob never forgets or forgives—and he owes you *one*. That's all! But, when I think of it, I shall constitute myself your lawful protector—because I never *did* meet any woman so precious ugly as you are; and ugliness, when joined to ferocity, is beauty in my eyes—as I have before told you."

"Well, well—we will discuss all these points another time," said Mrs. Mortimer. "I must leave you here," she added, stopping suddenly short at the corner of Wellington Street, leading to Waterloo Bridge.

"Your way is mine," observed Jack Rily, coolly, as he compelled her to walk on. "But, by the bye, what were you doing in that bank at the door of which I met you?"

"I merely went in to see a clerk of my acquaintance," replied the old woman, cursing in her heart the odious companion who thus pertinaciously attached himself to her.

"Come, that won't do, old gal!" exclaimed Jack, as he paid the toll for them both at the gate of the bridge. "I am so well acquainted with all the rigs and moves of London life, as to be able to tell in a moment whether a person coming out of a bank has been to receive money, or not. If it's a gentleman, he feels at his breeches-pocket to see that the cash is all safe—or he buttons his coat over his breast which proves that the notes are in his waistcoat. If it's a woman, she gripes her reticulate precious tight—or smooths down her dress just over where her pocket is—or else settles her shawl over her bosom, when the notes are there. This last was precisely what you did; and therefore, my old tiger-cat, I know that you've got money in the bosom of your dress: as well as if I saw you put it there."

"You're quite wrong for once in your life, Mr. Rily," said Mrs. Mortimer, trembling at the remarks which had just fallen upon her ears.

"Then why does your arm shake so as it hangs in mine?" demanded the Doctor, with an imperturbability which frightened the old woman more than if he had actually used threats: for, little as she had seen of him, she was well enough acquainted with his character to perceive that he was meditating mischief.

"My arm did *not* shake," cried Mrs. Mortimer, mustering up all her courage and presence of mind. "But here we are at the end of the bridge, and I must bid you good-bye. When shall we meet again?"

"We are not going to separate in a hurry, I can tell you," said the Doctor: "so don't think it. You know I love you," he added with a horrible grin, which opened his harelip so wide that he seemed to be an ogre about to devour her; "and I love much more still the bank-notes that you have got in your bosom. Besides, it is my duty to protect you from Vitriol Bob; and, in addition to all this, I think we shall be able to knock up a very cozy partnership together."

"And suppose that I decline the honour you intend me?" asked the old woman, assuming a tone of bitter sarcasm in order to induce Rily to believe that she was not afraid—though, in reality, her heart was sinking within her.

"In the case which you have suggested, I shall force you to do as I choose and act as I desire," coolly responded the Doctor.

"Force me, indeed!" repeated the old woman, withdrawing her arm, and stopping short in the Waterloo Road.

"Yes—force you," said Jack Rily, compelling her to take his arm again and also to walk on. "You had better not provoke me, because I am not the man to stick at trifles; and if you make a noise and raise a mob, I will swear black and blue that you are my wife—that you have bolted with my money—and that the notes are concealed somewhere about your person. Then, if the police should interfere, you will have to give an account of how you became possessed of the notes aforesaid;—and I dare say, from the estimate I have formed of your character, you would not like to be questioned on that point. In a word, then—unless I am mightily deceived—you have committed some nice little bit of roguery; and I mean to go halves with you."

This tirade was spun out to such a length and delivered in such a measured tone of coolness, that Mrs. Mortimer, who was perfectly astounded at the menaces with which it opened, had leisure to recover her self-possession: but the rapid survey of her position which she was enabled to take while the Doctor was finishing his harangue, was far from consolatory. She had indeed committed a little roguery, and would indeed be sorry to be questioned by the police; and she knew, moreover, that Jack Rily was quite capable of carrying all his threats into immediate execution.

What, then, was she to do? There was no alternative but to bend to circumstances—make the best of a bad job—and trust to the chapter of accidents so as to avail herself of any occurrence that might turn up in her favour.

"Well—you keep silent, old gal," said the Doctor, after a short pause. "Is it that you don't admire me sufficiently to take me as a husband, in the fashion of leaping over the broom-stick?"

"It is of the utmost importance that I should attend to certain pressing matters," returned Mrs. Mortimer; "and afterwards I shall be happy to fall into all your plans and projects."

"Well, we will attend to the pressing matters together," said the Doctor. "A husband and wife must have no secrets from each other. But since we have come this way, and as my abode happens to lie in the immediate neighbourhood, I propose at

once to introduce you thereto and install you as mistress of the place. I have got a comfortable crib—for Torrens's money did wonders for me, as you may well suppose."

At this moment a project flashed to the mind of the old woman. What if she were to yield, without farther hesitation or remonstrance, to the Doctor's proposals, and watch her opportunity either to murder him or escape when he was asleep? By wheedling herself into his confidence, she would know where he deposited the money which, she feared, must pass from her hands into his own; and she could repossess herself of it, if he were disposed of, or if she were wakeful while he slept.

"I do not mind accompanying you to your lodgings," she said; "and there we can talk over the whole business much better than in the open street."

"There! now you are getting into a better frame of mind," observed Jack Rily. "This way:—and he turned into the low streets lying on the left-hand side of the Waterloo Road, between Upper Stamford Street and the New Cut.

The neighbourhood alluded to swarms with brothels of the most infamous description; and half-naked women may be seen at all hours lounging about at the doors, and endeavouring to entice into their dens any respectable-looking men who happen to pass that way. Robberies are of frequent occurrence in those houses of ill fame; and the great aim of the vile females inhabiting them, is to entrap persons who are the worse for liquor and whose appearance denotes a well-filled purse. Neighbourhoods of this kind should be shunned by all decent persons, as if a pestilence were raging there!

It was into Roupel-street that Jack Rily conducted Mrs. Mortimer; and when he had introduced her to a small but well furnished parlour, with a bed-chamber communicating by means of folding-doors, he produced a bottle of brandy, saying, "Now let us drink to our happy meeting this day!"

Filling two glasses with the potent liquor, he handed one to the old woman, who swallowed the contents greedily: for she felt that she stood in need of a stimulant.

"Now, my beautiful tiger-cat," exclaimed the Doctor, as he drew down the blind over the window, "I am about to subject you to a little ceremony which may be perhaps looked upon as the least thing uncourteous; but it must be accomplished all the same. So don't let us have any bother about it."

Thus speaking, he approached the cupboard whence he had taken the brandy, and drawing forth a huge clasp-knife, he touched a spring which made the blade fly open and remain fixed as if it were a dagger.

"You do not mean to hurt me?" exclaimed the old woman, now becoming terribly alarmed—so much so, that she sank exhausted into a chair, while her looks were fixed appealingly on the man's countenance.

"Not unless you grow obstreperous or have any of your nonsense," said Jack. "I love you too well to harm you," he added, with a leer that made him more hideously ugly than ever: "but I must have my own way all the same. So just be so kind as to place upon the table the Bank-notes which you have got in the bosom of your gown. It is but fair that I should have a wife who can bring me a



dowry—and you must leave it to my generosity,” he went on to say, with a chuckling laugh. “how much I shall settle upon you afterwards.”

While he was thus speaking, Mrs. Mortimer rapidly revolved in her mind all the chances that were for or against her at that moment. Were she to scream and attempt resistance, could she succeed in alarming the neighbourhood before the miscreant would have plunged his dagger into her?—or, indeed, would he have recourse to such an extreme measure at all? These questions she at once decided against herself; and, reverting to her former project of affecting obedience, she thrust her hand into her bosom, dexterously separated a couple of the notes from the rest of the bundle, and threw those two upon the table.

Jack Rily instantly snatched them up; and when he perceived that they were for *a thousand pounds* each, he could scarcely contain his joy.

Flinging the terrible clasp-knife on the floor, he rushed upon the old woman, who was seized with too sudden and too profound a terror to permit her even to give utterance to the faintest ejaculation—for she thought that he intended to murder her:

but her cruel apprehensions fled in another moment when the loathsome monster, throwing his arms about her neck, began to embrace and fondle her as if she were a blooming beauty of seventeen instead of a hideous harridan upwards of sixty. Nevertheless, old and polluted as she was, and inured to all circumstances of disgust as her term of transportation had rendered her, she revolted with a sickening sensation from the pawings and caresses of the hare-lipped wretch who had thus enfolded her in his horrible embrace. She therefore struggled to rid herself of him—to escape from his arms: but he, almost maddened with the joy which the sight of the bank-notes had raised up in his breast, hugged her only the more tightly in proportion as her resistance became the more desperate.

“By heavens! I’ll kiss you again, old gal!” he exclaimed. “I care not how ugly the world may consider you—Be quiet now, can’t you?—to me you’re a paragon of beauty—Perdition! let go of me, you hell-cat—there! now you’re magnificent in your rage—that’s the humour I like to see a woman in—Hey-dey! what’s that?”

And, as he uttered this ejaculation, he suddenly quitted his hold upon Mrs. Mortimer, and pounced upon something that had rolled on the floor.

It was the bundle of Bank-notes, which had fallen from the old woman's dress during the struggle.

"By Jove! here's a treasure—a fortune—a King's ransom!" ejaculated the Doctor, scarcely able to believe his eyes, as he hastily turned over the notes with his hands. "My God! it is impossible!" he cried, his wonderment increasing to such a pitch, that he began to think he must be insane: then, a sudden idea striking him, he turned abruptly towards Mrs. Mortimer, who had sunk back, exhausted and overwhelmed with rage and grief, into the chair. "Ah! I understand it all now," he said, his voice changing in a moment to the low tone of solemn mystery: "you are a nice old girl, you are! Yes—yes—I understand it at last! These are all queer screens*—and you went into the bank to smash† some of them. By Jove! it's glorious."

Mrs. Mortimer, who was gasping for breath, could make no reply: her mouth was parched—her tongue was as dry as if she had been travelling for hours over a desert without tasting water.

"And yet," resumed Jack Rily, scrutinising the notes more narrowly still, "these are precious good imitations—too good to be imitations, indeed. I know enough of Bank-notes—aye, and of forged ones too—to see that these are the genuine flimsies. Blood and thunder! what a glorious old wretch you are!" he cried, again surveying her with a joy that was entirely unfeigned and amounted almost to admiration. "I suppose you have committed some splendid forgery. But of course it must be something of that kind," he added, a sudden reminiscence striking him: "or else you wouldn't have been so deucedly alarmed when I threatened just now to kick up a row in the streets and attract the notice of the police. So, you perceive, that I was pretty keen in my surmises. I knew you had money concealed in your bosom—and I was equally well convinced you had not obtained it by means that would bear inquiry. However, here it is—in my possession—and it can't be in safer hands. I'll just sit down quietly, and count how much there is."

Thus speaking, the monster picked up his clasp-knife, which he closed and consigned to his pocket; and he next proceeded to inspect the Bank-notes. But when he discovered the enormous sum to which they amounted, his astonishment grew to such an extreme as even to subdue his joy; and, shaking his head slowly, he observed, "This is such a heavy affair that the police will leave no stone unturned to detect the holders of the notes. Whatever we do, must be done at once; and in order that I should be able to judge what course to pursue, you must give me all the particulars of the transaction."

Mrs. Mortimer was struck by the truth of this observation: for she knew that the moment the forgery was detected, payment of the notes would be stopped, and advertisements announcing the usual caution would be inserted in the newspapers.

"Well, I suppose there is no use in disguising the real truth," she exclaimed, recovering her self-possession; "and I will tell you all about it in a few words. A certain nobleman—"

"Who is he?" demanded Rily. "Come—speak out plainly."

"The Marquis of Delmour, since you must know," returned the old woman.

"And what did he do," asked the man, impatiently.

"He gave me a cheque for six hundred pounds for a particular service that I rendered him; and he also gave my daughter—"

"Ah! you have got a daughter, eh?" exclaimed Jack Rily. "Is she anything like yourself?"

"She is as beautiful as an angel," answered Mrs. Mortimer, a scintillation of a mother's pride flashing at the moment in her bosom: "but as depraved and dissolute as a demoness," she added almost immediately. "Well, this Marquis of Delmour was wheedled by her out of a cheque for sixty thousand pounds; and though my daughter kept it quiet enough, I found out the secret. So away I sped—back to England I came—"

"Where did all this happen, then?" demanded Jack.

"In Paris—three days ago," replied Mrs. Mortimer. "On my arrival in London, my course was easy—"

"You may almost say *natural*," interrupted the Doctor. "I understand the business plainly enough at present. You altered your six hundred pound draft into one for sixty thousand—and you have thus forestalled your daughter?"

"That is precisely how the matter stands," said the old woman.

"And when is it likely that your daughter will be in London to present her cheque?" asked the Doctor.

"I should say that I had about twelve hours' start of her," was the response; "and then, as she would not travel by night—having a handsome young foreigner as her companion—the circumstance of her stopping to sleep on the road would delay her pretty nearly another twelve hours. Besides, she believes me to be still in Paris—she has not the least idea of my sudden return to England; and therefore she has no particular motive to induce her to adopt any extraordinary speed."

"Well, well," cried the Doctor, impatiently: "but all this palaver does not answer my question. When do you expect your daughter will reach London?"

"This evening," replied the old woman: "too late to present her cheque at the bank. And there *are* means—yes, there *are* means," she continued in a musing tone, "which, if skilfully adopted, would compel my daughter to refrain from offering her draft at all, and likewise force her to leave us in undisturbed possession of the money."

"And those means?" demanded Jack Rily, his eyes brightening.

"Before I explain myself, let us come to a thorough understanding," said Mrs. Mortimer. "Will you restore me one-half of the amount you now hold in your possession? I am content to abandon the other half to you."

"Yes, that is a bargain," answered Jack Rily; "for I see that you do not relish the idea of living with me altogether, and that you will leave me when this matter is properly settled. Is it not so?"

"Well, such is indeed my intention," responded the old woman.

"Our relative position now stands in this manner," continued Jack Rily: "there are sixty thousand pounds' worth of good notes. With all my connexion amongst fences and receivers of such flimsy, I could not manage to obtain gold for more

* Flash, or fictitious, notes.

† Pass off, or change.

than two or three thousand in the course of the day; and to-morrow morning your daughter may present her cheque, when a discovery will take place, and all the rest of the notes will be useless. As for going over to the continent, and endeavouring to pass them there, the thing would be ridiculous; for the advertisements in the newspapers would put all the money-changers in Europe upon their guard. Thus far, then, the notes are not worth more than two or three thousand pounds to me. But, on the other hand, you say that you have the means of stopping your daughter's mouth, and compelling her to put up with the loss. In this case, the whole amount of notes becomes available; and therefore we will share and share alike."

"Then give me my moiety at once," said the old woman, with greedy impatience.

"No such thing!" ejaculated Rily: "I must have some guarantee that you act properly in this business; and you can have no hesitation in putting your trust in me, because you have had a proof of my good feeling before. I have not forgotten that you saved my life in the struggle with Vitriol Bob; and the same feeling that made me give you half the spoil *then*, will prompt me to act with equal fairness now. You are therefore at liberty to depart when you choose, and to go where you like: the notes will remain in my possession—and when you come back to me with the assurance that you have prevented your daughter from taking any step that may lead to an explosion of the whole business, your share shall be immediately forthcoming. I have now put the matter in the proper light; and with such a good understanding, there can be no quarrelling. As to whether you afterwards choose to become my broom-stick wife, I must leave it entirely to yourself: for though I should be as happy as a king in the possession of your old person and sixty thousand pounds, yet I shall be able to console myself for your loss by means of the thirty thousand that will remain to me."

During this long tirade, all the first portion of which was delivered in a tone of business-like seriousness, Mrs. Mortimer was hastily reflecting upon the improvement that had so unexpectedly taken place in the aspect of her affairs: for she now found herself at liberty to leave the monster whom she loathed and abhorred, and she had every chance of regaining and being able to make use of the moiety of the Bank-notes.

She accordingly assented to the conditions proposed by the Doctor, leaving the broom-stick marriage "an open question;" and having settled her disordered attire, she took her departure—not however before she had been compelled to submit to another hugging on the part of the hare-lipped wretch whose caresses were so revolting and intolerable.

CHAPTER CXCIV.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER AGAIN.

It was about five o'clock in the evening of the same day on which these events occurred, that Laura Mortimer and the Count of Carignano, attended by Rosalie, arrived in London by the South Eastern Railway; and they immediately repaired to an hotel at the west-end of the town.

Although the young Italian nobleman had expe-

rienced sufficient leisure for reflection with regard to the step which he was about to take, the enthusiasm of his passion had not undergone the least abatement: on the contrary, the more he saw of Laura, and the longer he was in her company, the more ardently did he burn to make her his wife.

Nor can this infatuation on his part be a subject of wonder or surprise with our readers: for when it is remembered that the artful creature united the most winning ways and captivating manners to the most transcendent loveliness, and that the Count of Carignano had the warm Italian blood flowing in his veins,—when, too, it is recollected that the syren maintained an incessant fire upon his heart with the artillery of her charms and her fascinations—never permitting the conversation to droop throughout the journey, and never seeming wearied of lavishing the tenderest caresses upon her handsome companion,—when all these circumstances are taken into consideration, it cannot be a matter of wonderment if the silken chains in which Lorenzo was ensnared, were completely rivetted.

There was also this fact which served to strengthen *his* love and *her* power: namely, that she had not invited him to return to her in Paris—she had not sought to retain him within the sphere of her influence on the occasion of their first amour—she had not played the part of a mere adventuress or husband-hunter towards him. No: she had dismissed him with the understanding that their connexion could not be renewed—that she could neither become his wife nor his mistress;—and the young man had of his own accord flown back to her, as a suppliant for her hand! That she *could* be an adventuress or a husband-hunter, never therefore entered his imagination—even if for an instant he paused to ponder with any degree of seriousness upon her character; and so far from considering that he was bestowing any favour upon her by making her the sharer of his wealth and title, he looked upon himself as the party owing the obligation—he regarded himself as the happy individual who had the greater reason to rejoice at the connexion.

On her part, Laura Mortimer was most anxious that the marriage-knot should be tied as speedily as possible: for she naturally longed to place beyond all possibility of doubt or disappointment the brilliant destiny that had suddenly developed itself to her view. Even the possession of the cheque for sixty thousand pounds was a secondary consideration, in comparison with her desire to secure that proud title of Countess which was now within her reach.

Having partaken of a hasty dinner at the hotel, Laura and her intended husband repaired without delay to a fashionable house-agent in the neighbourhood; and it happened that he had upon his list a furnished villa of which possession might be taken at an hour's notice. It was situated in Westbourne Place, Pimlico, and was in perfect readiness for the reception of occupants. Thither the Count, Laura, and the house-agent immediately proceeded; and as the villa fully corresponded, in all its conveniences and appointments, with the description given, an arrangement was effected upon the spot for the tenancy.

Laura and the Count returned, however, to the hotel for that night; and early in the morning they repaired to Doctors' Commons, where the young nobleman speedily obtained a special licence. There-

attended by Rosalie, they drove to a church at no very great distance; and by eleven o'clock the hands of Laura Mortimer and the Count of Carignano were united at the altar.

The incidents of this forenoon had, however, been closely watched by Mrs. Mortimer.

The wily old woman, upon quitting the Doctor the day before, had reasoned thus within herself:—

"Laura has captivated a young Italian nobleman *whom she feels she can love—whom she already loves—and who possesses a proud title and princely revenues*. Those were the very words which she used when she communicated her matrimonial intentions to me in Paris. I know her well enough to be fully convinced that she will not delay a moment after her return to London, in securing her admirer. A special license must be the means—and, as her intended husband is a foreigner, Laura will no doubt accompany him, at least into the neighbourhood of Doctors' Commons. Even the presentation of her cheque at the banker's will be quite a secondary matter, when compared with the grand object of securing the coronet which she so much covets!"

It was in consequence of these reflections that Mrs. Mortimer rose early in the morning and repaired to the district of Doctors' Commons, where it is no difficult matter to become an observer without being observed, in the maze of narrow streets and little courts forming that neighbourhood. Nor was she mistaken in her conjecture—neither had she long to wait. In a short time a carriage—hired from the hotel—made its appearance, and a handsome young man, with a clear olive complexion and a glossy moustache, alighted. A lady thrust out her head to give him a few whispered instructions; and the beauteous countenance was not so completely shaded by the white bonnet and the veil, but that Mrs. Mortimer, from the nook where she had concealed herself, could recognise the features of her daughter. In a short time the handsome Italian returned, his own countenance glowing with delight; and the moment he re-entered the vehicle, it drove away. Mrs. Mortimer had a cab in attendance; and she followed the carriage to within sight of the church at which it stopped. She then dismissed the cab, and boldly entered the church, in order to become perfectly convinced that no unexpected accident should interfere with the marriage ceremony. Seating herself in a pew at a distance from the altar, she could behold everything without being observed by those whom she was thus watching. She saw Laura converse for a few moments with the sexton, who immediately afterwards hurried away; and in about a quarter of an hour he returned in company with the clergyman and the clerk. The ceremony then took place; and when the Count of Carignano was leading Laura back to the carriage, Rosalie being in close attendance upon them, Mrs. Mortimer suddenly emerged from the pew.

For an instant her daughter started and seemed profoundly vexed at this abrupt and unaccountable appearance of her parent: but in the next moment she recovered herself—possessed, and, assuming a smiling countenance, said, "I thought you were in Paris; this therefore is an unexpected pleasure. Permit me, Lorenzo," she added, turning towards her husband, "to present my mother, who has thus accidentally happened to enter, *for her own devotions*, the very church where our marriage has taken place."

As she uttered these words, Laura glanced with

imperious signification at the old woman, as much as to enjoin her not to deceive the Count relative to the accidental nature of this meeting: for the bride now understood full well that her mother had been watching her movements—though for what purpose she could not possibly divine.

"I am delighted to have the honour of an introduction to Mrs. Mortimer," said the Count, taking the old woman's hand: "and I hope that she approves of the alliance which her daughter has just formed?"

"Oh! assuredly, my lord," answered the harri-dan: "but I regret that I was not duly invited to be present at the ceremony. However, I am not the less contented that it should have taken place; and as my stay in London is very short, your lordship will perhaps excuse me if I crave a few minutes' private conversation with my daughter."

"You may accompany us to the house which we have taken, mother," said Laura: "and my dear Lorenzo will there grant us an opportunity of discoursing alone—on family matters—for a short time."

"Certainly!" exclaimed the nobleman, who was too happy to offer an objection to anything proposed by his charming wife, and who saw nothing sinister nor strange in the present scene, unless indeed it were the sudden and unexpected presence of the mother: but as she had offered no objection to the match, he did not choose to trouble his own felicity with any conjecture as to the cause of her abrupt appearance on the occasion.

The bride, bridegroom, Mrs. Mortimer, and Rosalie (who had acted as bridesmaid) accordingly entered the carriage, which drove away at a rapid pace towards Pimlico.

During the ride the conversation was of that general nature which settled upon no particular topic, and which therefore needs no detail here; and on the arrival of the party at the beautiful little villa in Westbourne Place, Mrs. Mortimer and Laura were speedily closetted together.

The moment they were thus alone, Laura's countenance suddenly changed; and her features assumed an expression of something more than sternness—for it was rage—as she said in an imperious tone, "Why have you been watching my movements?—and how dared you thus to intrude yourself upon me at such a time and place?"

"Because it is of the utmost importance that I should confer with you at once on a subject of deep interest to us both," replied Mrs. Mortimer, adopting a voice and manner of such cool insolence as to convince the shrewd and penetrating Laura that some circumstance had transpired to enable the old woman to proclaim her independence.

"And of what nature is that subject?" inquired the young lady, still treating her mother with a coolness almost amounting to disdain.

"In one sense, I am completely in your power: in another sense, you are entirely in mine," returned Mrs. Mortimer; "and therefore mutual concessions are necessary to enable us both to enjoy peace, and follow our own ways unmolested."

"You must explain yourself more fully yet," said Laura, believing the announcement that *she* was in her mother's power to allude to the secrets which the old woman might reveal relative to the dissoluteness of her former life. "If you desire me to render you any service," she added, after a few moments' pause, "you should not address me in the shape of menaces; because you know my disposition

well enough to be fully aware that I am not likely to yield to them, even though my own interests should suffer by my obstinacy in that respect."

"Perhaps you will talk differently in a few minutes," observed the old woman. "If we now stand face to face as enemies, it is your own fault."

"We will not re-argue all the points involved in that accusation," said Laura. "Remember the scene in Suffolk Street—remember also the remarks which passed between us the other evening in Paris; and then cease to charge me with the misunderstandings that may have sprung up between us. You desired to play the despot's part—I resisted—and in these few words all our differences are summed up. But I imagine that those differences were settled, and that an arrangement was made, whereby you were to dwell apart from me and receive a quarterly stipend of two hundred pounds. Have you thought better of the business?—or do you require some other terms?"

"Yes—I require other terms, indeed," exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer: then, fixing her eyes full upon the countenance of her daughter, she said, "I am in possession of a secret which would ruin you—"

"Enough, mother!" ejaculated Laura, her beautiful countenance becoming scarlet with rage. "I will hear no more—for I understand your menace. But now listen to me! You fancy that I am in your power:—you think that if you seek my husband and reveal to him all the particulars of my past life—my amours—my profligacy,—you flatter yourself, I say, that his love will turn to hatred, and that he will discard me! Now, I dare you to do your worst—I fear you not! In the first place, you shall not see my husband again: in the second, you could succeed in working no change in his sentiments towards me. I would give you the lie to every word you uttered! He knows that I am not a goddess of purity: but I should have little difficulty in persuading him that you are magnifying a comparatively venial frailty into a monstrous dissoluteness. And now, mother, you may leave me as speedily as you choose—and spare me the pain of thrusting you from my doors by main force."

Sublime and grand in the majesty of her beauty was the voluptuous—wanton—unprincipled Perdita,—(for on this occasion we must give her the name which so admirably represents her character),—as, drawn up to her full height, and with heaving bosom, flashing eyes, and expanding nostrils, she thus addressed her mother. Having laid aside her bonnet, shawl, and long white gloves, she seemed like a Pythoness in her bridal garments; and her manner was as energetic and awe-inspiring, as her voice was emphatic and determined in its full silver tones.

But the old woman lost not her composure: on the contrary, she listened to her daughter with the calm insolence of one possessing a last argument the enunciation of which would crush and overwhelm.

"One word, Laura," she said, in a voice that commanded the young lady's attention: "one word—and then act as you choose. If I ere now adopted a tone of menace, it was not with the intention of wielding such paltry and poor weapons as those to which you have alluded. I had not *then*, and have not *now*, the slightest intention of venting my spite in petty tittle-tattle relative to your amours: I will

not afford you the chance," she added, with keen sarcasm, "of using your sophistry for the purpose of colouring your dissoluteness so as to give it the air of a mere feminine frailty."

"Cease this long preface, and come to the point at once," said Laura, a vague fear coming over her, but which she concealed beneath a cold and rigid expression of countenance: at the same time, she saw full well that her mother was really possessed of some secret power whereof she was determined to make the most.

"My preface is done," continued Mrs. Mortimer; "and now for the matter to which it was to lead. You have this day married the Count of Carignano?"

"You need scarcely ask that question," said Laura; "since you have ere now accompanied us from the church where the ceremony was performed."

"And you will henceforth style yourself *Countess of Carignano*?" proceeded the old woman, still adopting an interrogatory style.

"Certainly," responded Laura: "I shall use the title to which marriage has given me a right. But to what point, may I once more ask, is all this long discourse to come?"

"To *this*," answered the old woman, approaching her daughter and sinking her voice to a low whisper: "to *this*," she repeated, her countenance becoming stern and resolute, while she abruptly stamped her foot imperiously upon the carpet: "to *this*, Laura—that your marriage of to-day is no marriage at all—that you consequently have no more right than I to the title of Countess—and that you have drawn down upon your head the peril of a prosecution for *bigamy*!"

An ice-chill came upon the heart of the young lady as these withering words met her ears: but, by means of an effort so powerful that it was anguish even to exercise it,—yes, agony thus to restrain her pent-up rage from finding a vent in a furious outburst,—she preserved an outward calmness which astonished her mother, who had expected to bring her down as an abject suppliant upon her knees.

"You must still explain yourself farther," said Laura, in a cold tone.

"What! you affect not to understand me?" exclaimed the old woman. "Or would you have the insolence to deny that you are already married to Charles Hatfield?"

"I do not condescend to a falsehood upon the subject—at least with *you*," responded Laura, contemptuously: though internally her agitation was immense.

"And yet you *did* deny it in Paris," said the old woman. "But I was aware of the fact at the time—and I cherished the secret, well knowing that it would serve me some day or another. I little thought, however, that I should so soon be compelled to make use of it."

"And for what purpose have you now proclaimed your knowledge thereof?" demanded Laura, a gleam of joy lighting up in her soul as she perceived that her mother was vexed and embarrassed by the calmness with which her menaces were received.

"In a word," resumed the old woman, "we are in the power of each other. You can transport *me*—and I can transport *you*."

"Again must I request you to explain yourself," said Laura. "You are evidently fencing with something that you wish, yet fear to communicate."

"I will speak out at once," exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer. "The cheque which the Marquis of Delmour

gave me for six hundred pounds, I altered in such a way as to make it represent sixty thousand; and I yesterday obtained the amount from the bankers. If you present *your* cheque, I shall be ruined; and therefore I propose a compromise."

"And by way of opening the negotiation, you level menaces at my head," said Laura, who, though at first startled by the announcement of the tremendous fraud perpetrated by her mother, had speedily recovered her self-possession.

"What, then, is your decision?" asked the old woman, trembling from head to foot, and no longer able to conceal the horrible fears that had come upon her: for she began to fancy that her daughter would not yield even to the threats that had been used to coerce her. "What is your decision, I repeat?"

"To refuse all compromise—to accept the gauntlet which you threw down at first, and which you would now gladly take back again—to place myself in a condition of open hostility to you!" answered Laura, her countenance growing stern and pale, and her lips quivering slightly.

"But it will be transportation for us both," exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer: "I for forgery—you for bigamy!"

"Permit me to give you my view of the case," said Laura. "I hold a cheque for sixty thousand pounds, which I shall present to-morrow; and the money must be paid to me. The bankers will be the sufferers by the forgery—not I, nor the Marquis of Delmour. This disposes of one part of the question. For the rest, I have only to observe that even if I were tried and convicted for bigamy, a fortune of sixty thousand pounds would be no mean consolation during, perhaps, imprisonment for two years or transportation for seven. I am not, however, so sure that any prosecution of the kind will take place, be you never so vindictive: for I question whether you will have the courage to open your lips to accuse *me* of bigamy, seeing that it would not only be *forgery* with which I should charge you—but *murder*!"

"Murder!" repeated the old woman, half in indignation and half in terror: "what mean you?"

"I mean that Mr. Torrens, your husband, *met with a violent death*," answered Laura,—"that you yourself gave me this information—and that you came over to London to be revenged upon him for his conduct of former times! Now, mother," she exclaimed, her countenance suddenly becoming radiant with triumph,—"now will you dare to repeat your menaces against me?"

The old woman staggered back a few paces, and sank into a chair. The tables had been completely turned against her: she had come to conquer—and she must depart conquered;—she had sought out Laura in the hope of reducing her to submission—she was herself now crushed and overwhelmed.

There was something shocking in the mortal enmity which had thus sprung up between the mother and daughter,—the former threatening transportation—the latter pointing to the gibbet looming in the distance!

"But you know—you know, in your own heart, that I did not take the life of Torrens?" suddenly ejaculated the old woman, starting from her seat.

"I know nothing more than what you yourself told me, mother," said Laura; "and if the matter should happen to go before the magistrate for investigation, I shall only state *what I do know*—and

shall not assist your cause with any conjecture relative to your innocence."

"And would you send me to the scaffold?" demanded the wretched woman, her voice becoming plaintive and mournful: "would you place me in such a position that I must inevitably sink beneath a mass of circumstantial evidence, and be condemned as a murderess?"

"Would you send your own child into transportation, the horrors of which you yourself have experienced?" asked Laura, bitterly.

"Oh! my God—this is a punishment for all my crimes!" exclaimed the miserable Mrs. Mortimer, a pang of remorse suddenly shooting through her heart like a barbed and fiery arrow.

"You should have calculated all the consequences before you came hither to menace me," observed Laura, still in a cold and severe tone—a tone that was un pitying and merciless.

"Can nothing move you?" asked the wretched woman, now completely subdued and cast down—overwhelmed and spirit-broken.

"Nothing!" responded Laura, sternly. "You may do your worst—I fear you not; and henceforth I acknowledge you not as my mother!"

Saturated with crimes—steeped in profligacy as the old woman's soul was, nevertheless this sudden renunciation of her by her own daughter went like a death-pang to her heart. She fell back again into the seat from which she had started a few minutes previously—a deadly pallor came over her countenance, rendering it hideous and ghastly as if the finger of the Destroyer were upon her—and her breath came in long and difficult sobs.

But her daughter stood gazing unmoved on this piteous spectacle,—stood like an avenging goddess, in her white robes, as if about to immolate her victim upon an altar!

"Give me a glass of water, Laura—for the love of God, a glass of water!" gasped the old woman at length, as she extended her arms piteously towards the relentless being, whose heart, so voluptuously tender beneath the influence of love, was hard as adamant against the appeals of her parent.

"Nothing—no, not even a drop of water, nor a crust of bread shall you receive beneath my roof," was the un pitying, remorseless answer.

"Then my curse be upon you—my curse be upon your dwelling, and all whom it contains!" cried the old woman, suddenly recovering her own energy and firmness—for the last words of her daughter had goaded her to desperation.

"The curses of fiends turn to blessings," said Laura, in a calm and deliberate voice.

"But a mother's curse is a terrible—terrible thing!" exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer, fixing her haggard eyes intently upon her daughter, who returned the gaze with looks of proud disdain and haughty defiance.

The old woman then rose slowly from her seat, and as slowly walked towards the door; on reaching which she turned round, and said, "Is there no way of restoring peace between us?"

"None," was the resolute and laconic answer.

Mrs. Mortimer hesitated yet for a few moments; then, as if suddenly embracing a desperate resolve, or struck by some terrible idea of vengeance, she abruptly quitted the room.

Laura listened, with suspended breath, to hear whether there was any one in the hall for her mother to speak to; but her apprehensions on this

head were speedily relieved, and in a few moments the front door closed behind the old woman.

The Count of Carignano, who had watched her departure from the drawing-room window, now hastened to join his lovely wife.

"The interview has been a long one—and, I fear, not altogether pleasant, dearest," he exclaimed, as he clasped Laura in his arms.

"My mother wished to exercise over me a despotism to which I cannot yield," responded the bride. "But wherefore did you conjecture that our meeting was disagreeable?"

"Because your countenance is very pale, my love," answered the Count, in a voice full of tenderness. "Ah! now it is growing animated—and the colour of the rose is returning to your lovely cheeks."

"Yes," murmured the fascinating woman, as she wound her snowy arms about her husband's neck, "it is because your presence has restored me to happiness, and banished from my mind the unpleasant impressions excited by my mother's behaviour. But we shall see her no more—and naught can now interfere with our perfect felicity."

"This assurance delights me," answered the Count, gazing with a joyous admiration upon the splendid creature who had that morning become his bride.

CHAPTER CXCIV.

HORRORS.

It will be recollected that Mrs. Mortimer was far from being unprovided with money—her share of the spoil obtained from Torrens still being in her possession, with the trifling deduction of the few pounds she had expended in travelling, clothes, and maintenance, during the interval that had elapsed since the occurrences in Stamford Street.

The bulk of the amount thus remaining to her had been carefully sewn in her stays, so that it had altogether escaped the notice of Jack Rily: and thus the old woman was not destitute of resources.

But the sum in her possession was a mere trifle when compared with that which she had hoped to acquire from the forgery; and she now resolved to leave no stone unturned—no measure unattempted, however desperate, in order to accomplish her aim. Besides, she longed—she craved to wreak a terrific vengeance upon her daughter,—yes—upon her own daughter: for the remorse and the softer feelings which had ere now found an avenue into her breast, when Laura renounced her, were only evanescent and short-lived. We have moreover seen that this temporary weakness was speedily succeeded by the desperation produced by a terrible resolve to which her mind came as it were all in a moment!

Impelled by this sinister influence, Mrs. Mortimer lost no time in repairing to Roupel Street, where she found Jack Rily loling in a chair, smoking his pipe and enjoying a quart of half-and-half.

"Well, my old tiger-cat, what news?" he exclaimed, the moment Mrs. Mortimer made her appearance. "Have you succeeded with your beautiful daughter?"

"Very far from it," was the answer. "And now," she added, ere the Doctor had time to give vent to the oath which rose to his lips through the exaction of disappointment,—“and now the matter

has come to that extreme point when nothing but a desperate step can prevent the presentation of the genuine cheque to-morrow."

"Are you sure it will not be presented to-day?" demanded Jack Rily.

"Yes; my daughter said that she should present it to-morrow," responded Mrs. Mortimer; "and I have every reason to believe that she will not go near the bank to-day. In fact, she was married this morning to a young Italian nobleman, whom she loves deeply, and whom she will not therefore quit, even for an hour, on her wedding-day."

"Well, and what do you propose?" asked Jack Rily, fixing upon her a significant look, which shewed that he already more than half divined what was passing in her bosom.

"Are you man enough to risk all—every thing—for the sake of that thirty thousand pounds which will become your share if we succeed?" demanded the old woman, returning the look with one of equally ominous meaning.

"I am man enough to do any thing for such a sum!" he answered, sinking his voice to a low whisper, and laying down his pipe—a proof that he considered the topic of discourse to be growing too serious to permit any abstraction of the thoughts.

"Then you understand me?" said Mrs. Mortimer, leaning forward, and surveying him with a penetration which appeared to read the secrets of his inmost soul.

"Yes—I understand you, my tiger-cat," replied the man; and he drew his hand significantly across his throat.

"Well, and will you do it?" she asked.

"But it is your own daughter," he observed, shuddering at the atrocity of the woman's mind which could calmly contemplate such a fearful deed.

"She has renounced me," was the laconic answer. "Nevertheless, you are still her mother," persisted Jack Rily.

"I discard her—for ever!" responded the horrible old woman.

"Well—you astounded me at first," said the Doctor, in a slow tone, as he reflected profoundly upon the extreme step suggested: "but I can look at the business with a more steady eye now. I always thought that I was bad enough: but, by God! you beat anything I ever knew in the shape of wickedness."

"Then you refuse—you decline?" exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer, interrogatively, while rage convulsed her entire frame—for she dreaded lest the money should be lost, and Laura escape her vengeance.

"By Satan!" cried the Doctor; "if you have pluck enough to propose, I am not the man to refuse to execute the scheme. But how do I know that when the critical moment comes, remorse won't seize on you, and you'll cry off?"

"When I have made up my mind to anything, I am not to be deterred by difficulty—danger—or compunction," answered the old woman. "I implored the ungrateful girl to give me a glass of water, when I was choking—and she refused. What mercy can I have towards her?"

"None," responded Jack Rily. "But you must enter into farther explanations, old tiger-cat: because at present I'm pretty well in the dark relative to the precise nature of your plans, and the way in which they are to be executed. It's now four o'clock in the afternoon—and we must settle

everything without delay, if it's to be done to-night."

"It is for to-night," said the old woman, emphatically. "My daughter and her husband have taken house in Pimlico——"

"How many servants?" demanded Jack Rily.

"I cannot exactly answer the question: but I know that there is a French lady's maid; and I saw an English valet, who had been recommended by the house-agent——"

"Never mind who recommended him," interrupted the Doctor, impatiently; "he is there—and that's enough for us. All I care about knowing is how many people we may have to deal with."

"But the venture must be made at any risk," observed Mrs. Mortimer. "It is of the highest consequence to us to gain possession of the genuine cheque——"

"And put the holder of it out of the way," added Jack Rily. "Oh! I understand your drift plainly enough: but I wish to see my course clear—because I'd better do the best I can with the notes under existing circumstances, rather than get a bullet through my brain or find myself laid by the heels in Newgate some time between this and to-morrow morning."

"Certainly—certainly," remarked Mrs. Mortimer.

"Well—upon what do you decide?"

"To risk the business," answered Jack, starting from his seat. "And now I'll just go and take a quiet walk down into Pimlico, for the purpose of surveying the premises. Whereabouts is it?"

"Westbourne Place, No. —," replied Mrs. Mortimer.

"Well—you can meet me again down in that neighbourhood at about midnight," said the Doctor. "Where shall the place of appointment be?"

"In Sloane Square, if you like," observed the old woman.

"Good—precisely at midnight. And now be off—because I am going to hide the Bank-notes so that nobody may be able to find them during my absence," said the Doctor, with a meaning look. "Of course I need hardly tell you that if you are scheming or manœuvring to get me into a plant down at Pimlico, you'll never go away alive to make a boast of it."

"The idea that I should act in such a way, is ridiculous," returned Mrs. Mortimer.

"Well—there is no harm in giving you the caution, old tiger-cat," remarked the Doctor, carelessly. "So tramp off—and be punctual to our appointment."

"I shall not fail," said the horrible woman, who thereupon took her departure.

How she passed the remainder of that day, we know not. Suffice it to say that the leisure-time which she had for reflection did not induce her to change her mind nor swerve from her purpose: on the contrary, as she entered Sloane Square a few minutes before midnight, it was with a determination to take her share in the awful tragedy which she contemplated—namely, the murder of her own daughter and the Count of Carignano. Bad and depraved as she was, never in her life until this occasion had she thought so calmly and coolly of shedding blood: for if on the previous day she had harboured the design of assassinating Jack Rily, in order to regain possession of the Bank-notes, it was not without a cold shudder, even though there was something like aggravation to inspire the idea. But now she had brought herself—or circumstances had

tutored her—to survey with a diabolical tranquillity the hideous, appalling crime which she had in view and as she walked along, she clutched with savage triumph a clasp-knife that she had purchased during the evening.

Precisely as the clock struck twelve Jack Rily joined her.

"Well, you have not altered your mind?" he said.

"It is rather for me to ask you that question," was her response.

"Oh, I am resolute enough!" he observed; and through the semi-obscurity of the night she could see his large white teeth flashing hideously between the opening in his lip. "I have taken a good survey of the premises," he continued, "and know exactly how to proceed. Have you got any weapon, old tiger-cat?"

"This," she replied, placing the clasp-knife in his hand.

He opened the blade—felt it—closed it again—and, returning the knife to his companion, said, "That will do. But there is one thing that troubles me a little," he added, after a few moments' hesitation; and I'll be hanged if I can get it off my mind. Yet—perdition seize it!—I am no coward either."

"What have you to fear, then?" demanded the old woman, hastily.

"Why, to tell you the truth—but come along farther away from the lamps—to tell you the truth, as I was jogging quietly down Sloane Street just now," continued Rily, glancing furtively around, "some one, coming hastily up from a narrow street on the right-hand side, passed just in front of me. We almost ran against each other, and I caught a glimpse of the fellow's countenance——"

"Who was he?" asked Mrs. Mortimer, shuddering in anticipation of the reply.

"Vitriol Bob," was the answer.

"I thought you were going to say so," exclaimed the old woman. "But perhaps he did not notice you—and even if he did, I suppose you are not afraid that he will attempt any mischief?"

"Whether he noticed me or not, I can't say," replied the Doctor; "because the encounter was so abrupt—so sudden—that he was off again in an instant. But if he did, I am well aware that he is capable of anything. However, I don't mean to let that prey upon my mind, I can tell you."

"And yet it *does* seem to have depressed you a little," said Mrs. Mortimer.

"Well—I'd rather it shouldn't have happened—that's all!" ejaculated the ruffian, forcing himself to assume a gaiety which he did not altogether feel; for, though no coward, yet the incident of his meeting with his sworn foe in the manner described, had troubled him.

Doubtless the man's mind, contemplating a diabolical crime, was more disposed to superstitious terrors, and to acknowledge the influence of presentiments, than on ordinary occasions: hence the vague uneasiness and undefined apprehensions that had seized upon him.

Mrs. Mortimer caught the dispiriting effects of the encounter which her confederate had experienced with one of the most desperate ruffians in London; and such a chill fell upon her mind, that she was about to propose the abandonment of the scheme, when Jack Rily suddenly exclaimed, "What thought of! I've something in my pocket that will do us good!"



With these words he produced a flask of brandy, which he handed to the old woman, who drank deeply: he then applied it to his own lips, and drained it of its contents.

"Now I feel all right again!" he cried, as he restored the empty bottle to his pocket. "There's nothing like a drop of the bingo at a crisis of this nature."

"Nothing!" observed Mrs. Mortimer, assentingly: for she likewise felt all her resolution—or rather hard-heartedness—suddenly revive under the influence of the alcohol.

"Now, then, let us proceed to business," said Jack. "I have got my own clasp-knife—a darkey*—and a small jimmy,† he continued; "and blowed if it shall be my fault, should we fail in the crack‡ to-night —"

"And all that is to follow," added Mrs. Mortimer, to whom the brandy had imparted a ferociousness which made her thirst as it were to drink her own daughter's blood.

* Dark lantern.

† A crow-bar used by burglars.

‡ Burglary.

The two miscreants—male and female—now proceeded in silence; and as they entered Westbourne Place a lovely moon broke forth from behind a cloud hitherto dark and menacing.

"This is the house," said Mrs. Mortimer, when they came within sight of the dwelling where Laura and the Count of Carignano were slumbering in each other's arms.

"I know it, old gal," responded Jack Rily. "We must turn into the lane that leads down by the side of the premises. Come along—quick—there's a person approaching from behind."

And, followed by the old woman, he darted into the alley which separated the Count of Carignano's abode from the neighbouring row of houses.

At the back of the villa there was a small garden, the boundary-wall of which was of no great height; and the Doctor, in the survey of the premises which he took during the evening, had made up his mind to effect an entry in the rear of the building.

"All is quiet," he said, in a low whisper to his companion. "I will climb on to the top of the

wall, and then help you up. We will soon make light work of it."

But scarcely were these words uttered, when a dark shadow appeared at the end of the lane—and in another moment Jack Rily and Mrs. Mortimer beheld a man hastening towards them.

The old woman instinctively drew close up to her powerful confederate for protection, in case mischief should be intended; and scarcely was this movement effected, when the cause of apprehension was close up to the spot where she and Rily were standing in the deep shade of the wall.

At that instant the moon-beams fell fully upon the man's countenance; and a cry of horror burst from the lips of Mrs. Mortimer as she recognised her terrible enemy—Vitriol Bob! Simultaneously with that cry, an ejaculation of rage escaped from Jack Rily, who, dashing the old woman away from him, sprang towards the formidable foe.

But ere the sounds of the cry and the ejaculation had died in the air, Vitriol Bob, nimbly eluding the attack of the Doctor, raised above his head something which his right hand grasped; and although the blow was intended for Jack Rily, it fell with an ominous crash full upon the countenance of Mrs. Mortimer, who, striving to escape, but bewildered by terror, was running across the lane, in front of Vitriol Bob, at the instant.

Then—O heavens! what a shriek of agony—what a yell of indescribable anguish broke upon the silence of the night—rending the air with its piercing sound, and raising echoes of even more horrifying wildness throughout the neighbourhood.

Vitriol Bob fled in one direction—Jack Rily in another; and the old woman was abandoned, alike by friend and foe, to her wretched fate!

But—see! the lights gleam in the windows of the very villa which was to have been the scene of a horrible murder: the painful yells, which still continue to beat the air with their agonising vibrations, have aroused the Count of Carignano—aroused also the lovely creature in whose arms he was sleeping. The valet and Rosalie likewise start from their respective couches; and the young Italian nobleman and the man-servant, having hastily thrown on some clothing, descend into the street.

The cries proceed from the lane: they rush to the spot—and there upon the ground they behold a female writhing like a stricken snake, evidently in the most horrible tortures.

What can it mean?

They do not wait to ask the question; but, raising the wretched sufferer from the ground, they bear her into the house—her shrieks and screams lacerating their ears all the time, and her contortions and writhings being so powerful that they can scarcely carry her along.

The neighbours have likewise been alarmed; but none have imitated the example of the generous young Italian, and descended from their bed-rooms to afford assistance. They look forth from their windows—satisfy themselves that aid is at hand—and, believing the uproar to be created by some poor woman in a fit, close the curtains and hasten back to bed again.

In the meantime the Count of Carignano and his valet have borne the writhing—yelling sufferer into the hall; and Laura descends the stairs with a candle in her hand. She has thrown on a dressing-gown and thrust her naked feet into slippers;

and her magnificent hair floats in massy undulations and luxuriant waves over her fine shoulders and her ample bosom.

But scarcely do the rays of the light fall upon the countenance of the suffering wretch, when the Count of Carignano starts back in horror, exclaiming, "Merciful God! do my eyes deceive me?—is it possible? Laura, dearest—"

"Tis my mother!" cried the young lady, hastening up to the spot where the old woman lay writhing and screaming fearfully upon the mat.

"Ah! that voice!" said the dying Mrs. Mortimer, suddenly desisting from the outpourings of ineffable agony, as the musical tones of her daughter fell upon her ears: "Laura—is it indeed you? Come near—give me your hand—I cannot see you—My God! I am blind—the fiend—the wretch—Come near, I say—Oh! I am dying—and this is the beginning of hell—"

"Mother—mother!" exclaimed Laura, whose heart was touched by witnessing the appalling pain that writhed the form of the old woman.

"Forgive me, my child—forgive me," gasped the dying wretch: "I came to—But all is growing dark in my mind as well as my eyes—forgive me, I say—forgive me—Oh! God!" she suddenly shrieked forth,—"*this—this* that I feel now must be Death!"

As these words fell from the old woman's tongue amidst gasps of agony, convulsions seized upon her—and she expired in the most shocking agonies.

CHAPTER CXCVI.

RESOLUTIONS.

WE must now return to Lord William Trevelyan, who, in pursuance of the promise made to the Marquis of Delmour, proceeded, the moment after that nobleman had left him, to the villa at Bayswater, which he reached shortly after mid-day; and he was at once conducted into the presence of Mrs. Sefton.

This lady was alone in the parlour; and the young nobleman immediately perceived that she had been weeping—although she endeavoured to conceal the fact beneath a smiling countenance as she rose to welcome him.

"My dear friend," she said, in a voice rendered tremulous by deep emotions; "how can I ever sufficiently thank you for your generosity—your unparalleled goodness, in adopting such measures to procure the liberation of Sir Gilbert Heathcote?"

"You have, then, seen him?" observed Trevelyan.

"He has but this moment left me," was the slow and mournful response: and, after a short pause, Mrs. Sefton said, as she sank back into her chair, "Our interview was at first a most joyous one; but at the end most melancholy."

"I cannot understand you," exclaimed Trevelyan, seating himself near her.

"Nevertheless, it is not my intention to affect any farther mystery, with regard to myself or my affairs, towards you," said Mrs. Sefton, hastily wiping away the tears that had started to her eyes, and composing her features with the sudden resolution of one who has determined upon the particular course which duty suggests. "Your conduct—the generosity of your disposition—and the attachment which you

experience for my beloved daughter, are all inducements and reasons wherefore I should at once communicate to you all my plans."

She again paused for a few moments, and then continued in the following manner:—

"The dearest hope of my life was accomplished on that day when my darling Agnes was restored to me; and since we have together occupied this secluded but delightful spot, I have had leisure to reflect upon those duties which I owe to my daughter. Moreover, I have well weighed all the circumstances of her position and my own; and I cannot blind my eyes to the fact that a great sacrifice must be made on my part to her reputation—her welfare—her purity of soul."

"I begin to understand you now, my dear friend," said Lord William Trevelyan, his countenance lighting up with the animation of joy: for he felt assured that he had not formed a wrong estimate of Mrs. Sefton's character, when he attributed to her the most amiable qualifications and excellent principles, in spite of her connexion with Sir Gilbert Heathcote.

"Oh! could you suspect even for an instant that I should permit my own selfish passion to triumph over my affection for that dear daughter who has been so miraculously restored to me?" exclaimed Mrs. Sefton. "No, my lord—no, my esteemed friend—I am not a woman of such a despicable description! Not an hour has elapsed since, in this very room, I said to Sir Gilbert Heathcote, '*We must separate, my well-beloved—and perhaps for a long, long time—if not for ever!*' He understood me—he appreciated my motives; and he scarcely sought to reason against my resolution—But, oh! this yielding—this assent on his part, was all the more generous—all the more praiseworthy—all the more noble!" cried Mrs. Sefton, in enthusiastic admiration of the absent baronet's character: "for I must no longer keep the fact a secret from you, my dear friend—although I blush to acknowledge it—But you will not think the worse of Agnes on account of her mother's crime——"

"Heaven forbid that I should be so unjust!" ejaculated Trevelyan, in an impassioned tone of profound sincerity.

"Thanks for that assurance—a thousand thanks!" exclaimed Mrs. Sefton. "Yes—she indeed is pure and virtuous; and I would sooner perish by my own hand than present to her an example of demoralisation in my own conduct. And it is this same sentiment that animates Sir Gilbert Heathcote—that has induced him to sacrifice all his own happiness to her welfare—so that she may never have to think ill of *her mother!* And now, my dear friend, you can probably conjecture the truth which my lips scarcely dare frame?—you can perhaps divine wherefore Sir Gilbert Heathcote is so deeply—so profoundly interested in the welfare of Agnes?"

"Yes—I comprehend it all!" cried Trevelyan.

"And now you must look upon me with loathing—with abhorrence," murmured Mrs. Sefton, burying her countenance in her hands: "you must despise and condemn the adulterous woman who allowed her husband to exist in the belief that another's child was his own!"

"No—no, my dear madam," exclaimed the young nobleman; "I entertain no such feelings towards you. I am acquainted with all your history—yes, all——"

"All!" she repeated, in a tone of surprise: then,

suddenly recollecting herself, she said, "Oh! true—Sir Gilbert told me that my husband was to call upon you this morning; and his lordship has therefore given you *his* version of our marriage-history."

"Indeed, my dear friend," returned Trevelyan, "he not only corroborated every thing you had already made known to me, but gave me so many additional details, all speaking in your favour—or at least in extenuation——"

"I am glad that the Marquis does me so much justice," interrupted Mrs. Sefton: "heaven knows that I wish him all possible happiness! And that he *has* endeavoured to obliterate all recollection of me from his mind, I am well aware; and in the arms of his mistresses he has sought relief from any sense of injury or wrong that he may have experienced. I do not mention this fact for the base and unworthy purpose of disparaging the man whom I know that I *have* injured: but it is in justice to myself——"

"Ah! my dear lady, let us turn away from this topic as soon as possible," interrupted Trevelyan.

"Cheerful, *most* cheerfully!" ejaculated Mrs. Sefton. "We will speak of Agnes—and of the resolutions which a sense of duty towards her has engendered on the part of Sir Gilbert and myself. Thus stand all our relative positions:—Should Sir Gilbert Heathcote become a frequent visitor at this house, the tongue of scandal would soon find food for its morbid appetite in this neighbourhood; and the discredit into which I should fall—the opprobrium heaped upon me, would be reflected upon my innocent daughter. That is one grave and important consideration. Another is that, even if the former did not exist, or if Sir Gilbert merely called occasionally in the light of a friend, it would be impossible, situated as we are, to avoid little familiarities or marks of affection, which would inevitably appear strange and extraordinary to Agnes, and by degrees shock her pure mind. Lastly, your lordship has honoured her with your attachment—you have demanded of me her hand in marriage when the suitable time shall arrive;—and in the interval the guardianship of the treasure which is to become your own, rests with me. I must fulfil that trust in a manner that will give you no cause to blush for the wife whom you will have to introduce to the world. It is known in some few quarters already—it may become generally known eventually, that the Marquis and Marchioness of Delmour have long ceased to dwell together: but the actual cause of this separation has never transpired, and need not. Thus, hitherto, nothing has occurred to reflect dishonour upon the name of Lady Agnes; and it behoves alike her mother, and *him who is her real father*, to pursue such a line of conduct as may be most suitable to the welfare, happiness, and peace of that beloved child."

"I thank you—most cordially, most sincerely do I thank you," exclaimed Lord William Trevelyan, "for all the resolutions you have adopted, and all the assurances you have now given me! Yes—I am indeed interested in the welfare of your charming daughter; and the generous sacrifices which yourself and Sir Gilbert have decided upon making, for her benefit, prove how noble are your hearts!"

"Nay—now you compliment us too highly," said Mrs. Sefton, with a smile. "We have determined upon performing our duty;—and if, by so doing," she continued, in a more serious strain, "I can con-

vince you that the equivocal position in which I have so many years been placed, has not destroyed the sense of rectitude and the true feelings of a mother in my breast, I shall yet be able to receive the assurances of your friendship without a blush, and without experiencing a sense of shame in your presence."

"Look upon me as your intended son-in-law, my excellent friend!" exclaimed Lord William. "My opinion of you is as high as if I were ignorant altogether of that equivocal position to which you allude; and my sentiments towards Sir Gilbert Heathcote are of the warmest description. For the sake of that daughter whom he dares not acknowledge as such, he renounces your society—he tears himself away from you—he abjures the companionship of her whom he has loved so faithfully for many, many years! This is a self-sacrifice—a generous devotion which cannot be too deeply appreciated. And now, my dear friend," continued the young nobleman, "it is my turn to give certain explanations. In a word, I have this morning seen your husband, as you are already aware—and he implored me to become instrumental in restoring his daughter to his care. To speak candidly, I came hither for the purpose of reasoning with you on the propriety of yielding to that desire on his part—"

"Oh! you would not separate me from my Agnes?" exclaimed Mrs. Sefton, clasping her hands in an appealing manner, while her countenance suddenly became pale and expressive of the acute anguish which the bare idea caused her to experience.

"No—not after all you have now told me!" cried Trevelyan, in a tone so emphatic as to be completely re-assuring. "I have such illimitable confidence in you that it would be an insult,—nay, more—a flagrant wrong,—to entertain the notion under existing circumstances. I shall call upon the Marquis of Delmour this evening or to-morrow, and candidly inform him that I can no longer recommend the separation of Lady Agnes from her mother."

"I return you my sincerest thanks for this proof of confidence which you give me," said Mrs. Sefton. "You had not, however, heard all the resolutions upon which Sir Gilbert and myself have this morning agreed; and now I have to make known to you a step that is about to be taken, and which is rendered necessary by the perseverance that the Marquis of Delmour is certain to exert with a view to regain possession of Agnes. I propose to take her to France, where we may dwell in some peaceful seclusion, until the two remaining years of her minority be passed."

"And during those two years," demanded Trevelyan, in a mournful tone, "am I to be debarred from the pleasure of beholding her whom I love so well?"

"I do not attempt to establish any interdiction of the kind," said Mrs. Sefton, with a smile. "You will of course be made acquainted with the place of our abode; and your correspondence or your visits—or both—will be received with delight."

"In this case, I must not offer a single objection to your plan," exclaimed Trevelyan, his countenance lighting up again.

"And had I recommended you neither to visit nor correspond," said Mrs. Sefton, in an arch tone of semi-reproach, "should you have opposed our departure?"

"Oh! no—no: do not think that I am so selfish!" he cried. "I should have considered this to be the

day of self-devotion for all who are interested in the welfare of your beautiful—your amiable Agnes. But I behold her in the garden!" he exclaimed, as he looked towards the window opening on the lawn at the back of the villa. "Have I your permission to join her there for a few minutes?"

Mrs. Sefton signified her assent with a smile and a graceful gesture; and in a few moments Trevelyan was by the side of the beautiful Agnes in the garden.

The young lady was mournful at first—because her mother had already communicated to her their intended departure for the continent: but when Trevelyan, turning the discourse upon that topic, gave her to understand that he had received permission to visit them wheresoever they might fix their abode, and correspond with them frequently,—when he even ventured so far as to hint how it was more than probable that he would follow them to the same place, and establish his own temporary dwelling there, so as to be able to see them every day,—then was it that the young maiden's countenance brightened up, and Trevelyan gathered therefrom the silent but eloquent assurance that he was not indifferent to her.

The few minutes which he had obtained permission to pass with Agnes grew into hours; and when, between four and five o'clock in the evening, Mrs. Sefton came herself to announce to the youthful pair in the garden that dinner was already served up, he uttered an ejaculation of surprise that it could be so late! Agnes said nothing—but cast down her eyes, and blushed deeply; and her mother, who knew what love was and all its symptoms, was now fully convinced that her daughter's gentle heart was well disposed towards the noble suitor for her hand.

CHAPTER CXCVII.

THE MARQUIS OF DELMOUR.

ON the following morning, Lord William Trevelyan called upon the Marquis of Delmour, whom he found pacing his apartment in great agitation.

The old nobleman had two sources of annoyance at that moment: the first was the suspense in which he existed relative to the result of his endeavours to regain possession of Agnes, whom he devotedly loved;—and the other was in respect to Laura Mortimer.

He had heard from his bankers on the previous evening that the cheque for sixty thousand pounds had been duly presented and cashed; and he therefore concluded that the young lady had arrived in London. But why had she not written to him? His impatience to receive a note from her was in proportion to the madness—the intensity, of that passion with which her transcendent loveliness and her syren witcheries had inspired him; and his excited imagination conjured up a thousand reasons for this silence. He fancied that some accident might have occurred to her,—or that she had written, and her letter had miscarried; in which case she herself would be marvelling at his tardiness in replying to her,—or that she had changed her mind, and repented of the promise she had made to become the old man's mistress. Then jealousy took possession of his soul; and he could scarcely con-

trol within reasonable bounds the emotions that agitated in his breast.

The arrival of Trevelyan, however, promised to relieve him of at least one cause of suspense and anxiety; and, the moment the young nobleman entered the apartment, the Marquis rushed precipitately forward to meet him.

"In pursuance of my promise," said Lord William, when the usual compliments were interchanged, "I called upon her ladyship—Mrs. Sefton, I mean yesterday—and had a long interview with her."

"And the result?" demanded the Marquis, impatiently.

"I regret to state that, after all I heard upon the occasion, I cannot either recommend the withdrawal of Lady Agnes from her mother's charge, or interfere any farther in this family matter," responded the young nobleman. "Mrs. Sefton will see Sir Gilbert Heathcote no more, and will devote herself to that maternal care which she is so well qualified to bestow upon her daughter."

"Then, my lord," exclaimed the Marquis, impatiently, "I shall at once appeal to the tribunals of my country for that redress which I ought to have demanded long ago."

"Pardon me, my lord," said Trevelyan, "for reminding you that there is much to be considered ere you put this threat into execution. By giving publicity to your unhappy family-affairs, you may to some extent act injuriously to the welfare of your daughter."

"True!" ejaculated the old nobleman, struck by the observation. "And yet am I to remain quiet and tranquil beneath this additional wrong which is thus thrust upon me by her who in law is still my wife?"

"For your daughter's sake you must endure it—if a wrong it indeed be," answered Trevelyan solemnly.

"And Agnes—has she learnt the secret of her birth?—does she cling to her mother, in preference to me?—does she devote not a single thought to the father who has ever behaved with so much tenderness towards her?" demanded the Marquis. "Reply, my lord, to all these questions."

"Your daughter still believes herself to be plain Miss Agnes," was the answer; "and she is not taught to forget her father."

"But what must she think of the strange circumstance, that while she believes herself to be the bearer of her father's name of Vernon, her mother is known by that of Sefton?" asked the nobleman.

"She has adopted the latter name, as a natural consequence of her restoration to the maternal parent," was the reply; "but her pure and artless mind cherishes not the curiosity which, in ordinary cases, would prompt many questions relative to all these points. She imagines, generally, that particular causes of unhappiness have led to the separation of her parents, and that the adoption of different names was the necessary result. For the rest, believe me that she will be well cared for by her mother, and that she will never be tutored to think of you otherwise than with respect and gratitude."

"Is she happy with her mother—happier than she was in her own cottage, under my care?" inquired the Marquis, after a long pause, during which he seemed to reflect deeply.

"She is happy, my lord," responded Trevelyan; "but I will not aver that she is ^{happier} than she

was. She thinks of you constantly—speaks of you often—"

"Then I will do nothing that shall interfere with her tranquillity—nothing that shall bring into the light of publicity those circumstances that would give her so much pain," interrupted the Marquis, who, though sensual, jealous, and imperious in disposition,—though addicted to pleasures of a profligate description,—was nevertheless characterised by many lofty feelings and generous sentiments, as indeed the whole tenour of his conduct towards Agnes had fully proven.

Lord William Trevelyan thanked him for the assurances which he had just given, and shortly afterwards took his leave, highly rejoiced at the manner in which the interview had terminated.

It must be observed that the passion which the Marquis of Delmour had formed for Laura Mortimer and the hope which he entertained of speedily possessing her as his mistress, had in a slight degree diminished the intensity of his anxiety to recover Agnes; inasmuch as his arrangements in respect to Laura had not only served to occupy his mind—abstract his thoughts somewhat from the contemplation of the loss of his daughter—and hold forth the promise of a solace to be derived from the society of that lovely creature whose unaccountable silence nevertheless tormented him sadly.

The day passed—and still no communication arrived. Let it be remembered it was on this self-same day that Laura and the Count were married; and it was during the following night that Mrs. Mortimer met her dreadful death in the manner already described.

The ensuing morning found the Marquis pale, agitated, and racked by a thousand anxious fears, amongst which jealousy was often uppermost as he revolved in his mind all the possible reasons that could account for the protracted silence of the young lady.

He sat down to breakfast for form's sake—but ate nothing. Never did his gilded saloons appear more desolate—more lonely;—and yet it was not to them that he had contemplated bringing his beautiful mistress!

Presently the morning papers were laid upon the table; and mechanically casting his eyes over one of them, he observed a short article, headed "DIABOLICAL OUTRAGE AND FRIGHTFUL DEATH."

He commenced the perusal of the account; and the apathy with which he began, speedily changed into the most intense interest: for the article ran thus:—

"Last night, shortly after the hour of twelve, the inhabitants of Westbourne Place and the immediate neighbourhood were thrown into the greatest alarm by the sudden outburst of the most dreadful screaming, as of a female in mortal agonies. Those terrific signs of distress appeared to emanate from a narrow lane, passing by the side of a beautiful villa in the occupation of the Count and Countess of Carignano, who, it appears, had been married in the morning, and had only entered their new abode immediately after the ceremony. His lordship, attended by his valet, lost no time in descending to the succour of the afflicted person, whoever it might be; and they discovered an elderly lady in the agonies of death. They conveyed her into the villa, where, to the horror of the Count and his lovely

bride, it was found that the dying woman was none other than Mrs. Mortimer, the mother of the Countess. Medical assistance was promptly sent for; but before the nearest surgeon could arrive, death had terminated the sufferings of the lamented lady. The horrible nature of those sufferings can be readily understood, when, on surgical examination, it transpired that an immense quantity of the strongest vitriol had been thrown over her; and there were proofs that the bottle containing the burning fluid had been broken over her head. The affair is involved in some mystery: but it is presumed that, while repairing to her daughter's abode, she must have missed her way and got into the lane, where some murderous ruffian, undeserving of the name of a man, perpetrated the frightful outrage. Our readers may remember that this is not the only case of the terrible use of vitriol which we have recently been so painfully compelled to record; and, from all we can learn, there is a monster in human shape, well known to the police, and bearing the significant though horrible denomination of *Vitriol Robert*—or more familiarly, *Vitriol Bob*—who has for some time past infested the metropolis, and who makes use of the burning liquid as an adjunct to his predatory attacks on the unwary in lone or dark neighbourhoods. The above are all the particulars which we have been as yet able to obtain, owing to the advanced period of the night when the diabolical outrage was perpetrated."

This narrative, detailed with all the mannerism of an expert penny-a-liner, excited the jealous rage of the Marquis of Delmour almost to madness.

The whole thing was as clear as daylight! The Mrs. Mortimer who had met her death in such a dreadful way, was evidently the old woman whom he had seen on several occasions; and she was, after all, the mother of Laura! The perfidious Laura herself had become the wife of another;—and the Marquis was compelled to open his eyes to the fact that he had been most egregiously duped by an adventuress.

Hastily summoning his carriage, the Marquis proceeded direct to his bankers'; where he found that the sixty thousand pounds had indeed been paid; but, on farther inquiry, he ascertained that an old woman had presented the cheque. The description of the recipient was then given by the clerk who cashed the draft; and the Marquis became convinced that she was none other than Mrs. Mortimer. The bankers perceiving that he was anxious to learn who had actually obtained the money, produced the cheque itself, the female's name being written on the back in token of acquittal; and there were the words—*MARTHA MORTIMER*.

In a mechanical way, and while deliberating what step next to take, the enraged nobleman cast his eyes over the draft; when he started convulsively—for he instantly detected the forgery, or rather alteration, that had been effected: and then, in his furious excitement, the principal facts of the story came out—showing how he had been induced to give the cheque.

All was now amazement and alarm in the bank-parlour; and one of the partners in the firm suggested the propriety of repairing immediately to the dwelling of the Count of Carignano, for the purpose of communicating with the Countess relative to the transaction. But the Marquis, who by this time had grown somewhat more cool, began to reflect that any publicity which was given to the

matter would only cover him with ridicule; and as the money was not of such consequence to him as the avoidance of the shame attendant on the business, he wisely resolved to hush up the whole affair.

The bankers were by no means averse to this amicable mode of adjustment, inasmuch as it relieved them from all doubt or uncertainty, and all possibility of dispute relative to the party on whom the loss consequent on the forgery was to fall; and they therefore readily consented to retain the transaction profoundly secret. At the same time, they understood fully that they were not to pay the genuine cheque for sixty thousand pounds, in case of its presentation; the Marquis resolving to take time to consider what course he should pursue with regard to that portion of the business.

The old nobleman drove home again; and, on his arrival at his stately mansion, he shut himself up in his own chamber to reflect upon the startling revelations of that day.

Not for an instant did he entertain the idea of seeking an interview with Laura. Such a step was useless: for she had no doubt married, he reasoned, according to her taste. Moreover, his pride revolted at the bare idea of undergoing the humiliation and shame of being laughed at by one who would probably care nothing for any reproaches that might be levelled against her.

But how was he to recover the cheque? It was valid in her hands: for even if she had connived at her mother's forgery, the collusion could not be brought home to her. Still, the Marquis did not at all admire the idea of paying another sixty thousand—especially for one who had so grossly deceived him.

By degrees the old nobleman's thoughts became so bewildering that he felt as if he were going mad. He had lost his daughter—he had lost his mistress—he had been duped out of his money—and, vile though Laura evidently was, he nevertheless still adored her image with a devouring passion.

He walked up and down his room in a state of excitement that was increasing cruelly, and that produced a hurry in the brain—a confusion in the ideas—a delirium in the imagination.

The fever of his reflections augmented to such a height that he began to conjure up a variety of evils and annoyances which did not really exist. He pictured to himself his bankers laughing heartily at his folly—retailing the scandal as an excellent joke—and propagating the most offensive rumours all over the town. He fancied that he beheld his friends and acquaintances endeavouring to conceal their satirical smiles as they accosted him—he beheld the entire House of Lords forgetting their dignity and whispering together in a significant manner as he entered the assembly. Then his thoughts suddenly travelled to Agnes; and all his ancient doubts and fears relative to his paternity in respect to her, returned with overpowering violence; until he felt convinced that she was indeed the offspring of an adulterous connexion between his wife and Sir Gilbert Heathcote. Lastly, by a rapid transition, his imagination wandered to the abode of the Count and Countess of Carignano; and he pictured the lovely—seducing—voluptuous Laura in the arms of a rival!

All these reflections maddened the old man—deprived him of his reason—rendered him desperate—and made life appear to him a burthen of anguish and an intolerable misfortune.

He did not remember his boundless wealth—his proud titles—his stately mansions—and all the means of pleasure, enjoyment, and solace that were within his reach: his morbid condition of mind obtained such a potent sway over him, that he only saw in himself a lone—desolate—wretched old man,—deprived of his daughter—deprived of his mistress—deprived of his money—and with the myriad fingers of scorn pointing towards him.

Though the sun was shining joyously, and its golden beams penetrated into the chamber through the opening in the rich drapery,—yet all seemed dark—dreary—and cheerless to the miserable Marquis of Delmour: his powerful intellect—his vigorous understanding—his moral courage, were all subdued—crushed—overwhelmed beneath a weight of trifling realities and tremendous fancies.

In this state of mind the miserable man suddenly rushed to his toilette-case—seized his razor—and inflicted a ghastly wound upon his throat.

At the same instant that he fell—the blood pouring forth like a torrent—a valet entered the room, bearing a letter upon a silver tray.

CHAPTER CXCVIII.

CASTELCICALA.

TURN we now to the State of Castalcicala—that lovely land which lies between the northern frontiers of the Neapolitan dominions and the southern confines of the Papal territory.

It was a glorious morning—and bright and varied were the hues which the sea took from the rosy clouds, as a splendid war-steamer advanced rapidly over the bosom of the waters.

The Royal Standard of Castalcicala floated from the main-mast; and upon the deck was a group of officers in magnificent uniforms, gathered around a young man of tall form and noble air, who was attired in deep black. But upon his breast a star denoted his sovereign rank; and his commanding, though unaffected demeanour well became the chieftain of a mighty State.

That gallant steamer was the *Torione*, the pride of the Royal Navy of Castalcicala—that young man was Richard Markham, now become the grand Duke of the principality which he had rescued from slavery—and amongst the aides-de-camp in attendance was his enthusiastic admirer, the erring but deeply repentant Charles Hatfield.

Shortly after ten o'clock on this glorious morning the steamer came within sight of Montoni, the capital of Castalcicala; and as soon as the Royal Standard was descried by those in that city who were earnestly watching the arrival of their new monarch, the artillery of the batteries and the cannon of the ships in the harbour thundered forth a salute in honour of the illustrious prince.

In an hour and a half the steamer swept gallantly into the fine port of Montoni; the yards of all the vessels were manned; and the welkin rang with enthusiastic shouts of welcome.

Richard—or, as we should rather call him, Ricardo—was deeply affected by these demonstrations, which he acknowledged with many graceful bows; and when he landed amongst the greatest concourse of multitudes ever assembled on the quays of Montoni, and amidst the most joyous cries and the

thunder of the artillery, he retained his hat in his hand as a proof of respect to that Sovereign People from whom his power emanated.

The royal carriages were in attendance; and as he rode along the streets towards the palace, the vast crowds kept pace with the vehicles, cheering and waving their hats and handkerchiefs all the way. The windows and balconies were filled with gentlemen and elegantly-dressed ladies; and flowers were thrown forth by fair hands in token of the general delight which attended upon the arrival of the warrior-prince.

As on the day after the memorable battle of Montoni, which gave peace and freedom to Castalcicala, the bells were ringing in every tower, and the cannon were still vomiting forth their thunder, their fire, and their smoke, when the Grand Duke Ricardo alighted at the entrance of the palace. There—upon the marble steps—stood the joy of his heart, the charming and well-beloved Isabella, with their two children, the little Prince Alberto and the Princess Eliza—so called after a valued friend.* In company with Isabella were her mother (now Dowager Grand Duchess), Ricardo's sister the Princess Katherine, and her husband Prince Mario. All were dressed in deep mourning: but the presence of Ricardo evoked smiles as well as tears,—and those who wept for the loss of the late lamented Grand Duke, found consolation and experienced a source of ineffable joy in the possession of him who had become his successor.

Moreover, the funeral of the departed one had already taken place; and there was consequently no sad ceremony to be performed which might revive the bitterness of grief.

That evening Montoni was brilliantly illuminated; and the streets were thronged with multitudes who made a general holiday on the occasion of the arrival of that excellent prince to whom they owed so much.

And it was a glorious spectacle to behold the appearance of the people in that capital of the most prosperous country in the whole world. Not a mendicant was to be seen: the loathsome rags and hideous emblems of poverty which meet the eye in every thoroughfare and in every corner of London, had ceased to exist in Montoni. The industrious classes were all cheerful in looks and neat in attire; and instead of the emaciated women, and pale, sickly children observable in such appalling numbers in the British metropolis, the wives of the working-men were all comely and contented, and their offspring ruddy with the hues of vigorous health. Oh! it was a blessed—blessed thing to behold those gay and happy multitudes—rendered thus gay and thus happy by means of good institutions, honest Ministers, and a Parliament chosen by the entire male adult population!

Though the streets were thus thronged to excess, and the houses of entertainment were crowded, the utmost order, sobriety, and tranquillity prevailed. There were no police visible: because none were required. Every citizen, whether employer or employed—whether capitalist or mechanic—whether gentleman or artisan—whether landowner or labourer, was himself a policeman, as it were, in his own good conduct and excellent example. *For from the time that liberal and enlightened institutions,*

* Eliza Sydney. See First Series of "THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON."

involving the true spirit of Republicanism, were applied to Castalcicala, the regular police-force had been abolished; and no necessity arose for its revival.

Such was the aspect of the capital of Castalcicala—that model State where Liberty, Fraternity, and Equality were acknowledged principles, practically known and duly appreciated.

On the ensuing morning the Grand Duke Ricardo proceeded to the Chamber of Deputies, where the Senators were also assembled on the occasion. The galleries were crowded with ladies and gentlemen; and the whole of the diplomatic corps were in the seats allotted to them. Even though all present were in deep mourning for the late sovereign, the aspect of the spacious hall was far from gloomy, though solemn and imposing.

The arrival of the new Grand Duke was expected with the most intense interest. It was well known that not only had he suggested the principal reforms which Duke Alberto had applied to Castalcicala, but that he was even far more liberal in his political opinions than his departed father-in-law. It was consequently anticipated that on the present occasion he would enunciate the line of policy which it was his intention to adopt; and every one felt convinced that this would prove a day memorable in the history of Castalcicala.

We should observe that on the platform of the Chamber, instead of the throne being placed for the reception of the Grand Duke, a simple arm-chair was raised about three feet higher than that occupied by the President of the Deputies; and instead of the royal standard flowing with its graceful drapery over-head, the tricolour was suspended to the wall. These changes, it was well known, had been effected by order of the Grand Duke himself; and all present were aware that his Sovereign Highness was not the man merely to displace the symbols of royalty without having some congenial and practical object in view.

At half-past ten o'clock the Ministers entered and took their seats amidst loud applause from the galleries; for this was the same Cabinet that Ricardo had nominated five years previously, during his brief Regency; and its policy had been such as to gain for it the enthusiastic affection of the nation and the admiration of the whole civilised world.

Shortly after the arrival of these high functionaries, the Royal Family appeared in the Chamber, amidst deafening cheers, and took their seats upon the platform, behind the President's desk; and in a few minutes the roar of the artillery on the ramparts announced to the capital that the Grand Duke had quitted the palace on his way to the legislative assembly.

It was precisely at eleven that Ricardo, attended by his staff, entered the hall; and his presence was the signal for a more hearty renewal of the cheering, while the ladies in the galleries waved their snowy handkerchiefs in unfeigned welcome.

But it was almost immediately noticed that the Grand Duke appeared—not in the royal robes worn on such occasions by all his predecessors—but in the uniform of a Field-Marshal, with a black crape round his left arm in token of mourning for the late monarch. He was decorated only with the Castalcicalan Order of Knighthood, and did not even wear upon his breast the star that denoted his sovereign rank. These circumstances gave a sharper edge to the keenness of curiosity; and when the

cheering, which was loud and long, died away beneath the lofty roof of the spacious hall, the silence that ensued was deep and solemn as that of the tomb.

Then the Grand Duke, rising from the arm-chair which he had for a few moments occupied, addressed the assembly in the following manner:

"MY LORDS AND GENTLEMEN,—You have recently experienced a great and grievous loss in the death of a wise, enlightened, and virtuous Sovereign, whose brief but glorious reign was devoted to those measures best calculated to ensure the happiness, prosperity, and morality of the Castalcicalan People. The name of Alberto will live in history so long as the world shall endure; and his memory will be cherished in the hearts of this and all succeeding generations of the inhabitants of that clime which his wisdom and his example have so supremely blessed.

"Had I consulted my own private feelings, I should have allowed some time to elapse ere I appeared before you to shadow forth that line of policy which it is my duty to recommend to your deliberations: I should have craved leisure to weep over the loss of my illustrious father-in-law, and meditate upon those grand lessons which his memorable reign have taught us. But I feel that the welfare of an entire people is too solemnly important and too sacred a thing to be for even a moment lost sight of; and that when the head of a State is called away to the tomb, his successor must devote no time to a grief which cannot recall the departed, but must at once take up without intermission the grand work of reform that was progressing at the period of Death's arrival. For it is a great and flagrant wrong for those who are entrusted with power, to interpose delays in the proper exercise thereof; and that man is a traitor to his country and deserves execration who dares to intimate that there is no need of haste in accomplishing a great national good.

"These are the motives which have induced me to appear thus before you even at so early a period that the remains of my lamented predecessor can scarcely be said to have grown cold in the tomb: but I repeat that if men accept the responsibilities of power and office, they must permit no considerations to retard them in the performance of their duty and the fulfilment of their high vicarious mission.

"Last evening I assembled the Ministers around me, and submitted to them the views which I had some time ago matured, and which I proposed to put into practice so soon as the natural course of events and the will of the Sovereign People should place me at the head of affairs. The Ministers were unanimous in adopting those views, and cheerfully undertook to lay them in the usual manner before the Legislative Assemblies. But in the meantime, it behoves me briefly to detail the nature of those plans which are thus deemed suitable to the interests and in accordance with the just rights of the Castalcicalans.

"In the first place I propose that the form of Government shall be Republican, not merely in institutions, but likewise in name; and in order that this idea may be fully carried out, it will be necessary that certain sacrifices should be made in particular quarters. I now especially allude to the class denominated *the nobility*. The existence of aristocratic titles is totally incompatible with the



unity and simplicity of Republicanism, and the country therefore expects from the patriotism of the nobles a ready concession of these invidious distinctions,—distinctions which are nothing more nor less than the relics of feudal barbarism. For my part, I cheerfully undertake to set the example, if example be indeed required to induce men to the performance of their duty. With this determination I have come before you to-day,—not as the Grand Duke of Castalcicala—not as a Sovereign-Prince,—but as the First Magistrate of the State, retaining only that military rank which I have won upon the fields of victory. From this moment, then, you may know me, and I wish to be known only, as General Markham; and this same abnegation of title I proclaim on the part of my beloved wife, my revered mother-in-law, and the rest of the Royal Family."

During several parts of his speech, Ricardo had been frequently interrupted by outbursts of enthusiastic cheering: but when he reached this solemn and important climax, the whole assembly rose and greeted him with the most joyous shouts—the most

fervent applause that ever expressed the unfeigned admiration of a generous patriotism. The ladies in the galleries absolutely wept in the excitement of their feelings: for never—never was seen so sublime a spectacle as this of a mighty Prince casting his crown, his sceptre, and his titles at the feet of the Goddess of Liberty!

"I accept with ineffable pleasure this demonstration of approval," resumed Ricardo, after a long pause; "and it gave me unspeakable delight to behold the Peers themselves joining as enthusiastically as the rest in those evidences of assent. When all titles are abolished, save those which properly and necessarily belong to the various grades of naval and military rank, the vanity attending upon the pride of birth will perish through a deserved inanition, and emulation will point to the only true aristocracy,—namely, that of VIRTUE and of MIND. The Ministers will accordingly propose to you such measures as may tend effectually to establish Republican Institutions in this State. They will recommend the abolition of the Upper House, and the retention only of the Chamber of Deputies.

which must be numerically strengthened. They will propose that the Chief Magistrate, to be denominated *President*, shall be chosen for a period of three years, and liable to re-election. The power of *veto*, the privilege of making peace or declaring war, and other attributes purely monarchical, will not be conceded to the President, but must exist in the Chamber itself; and, instead of the effigy of the ruler upon the current coin, the arms of the Republic should be impressed. Every public act and deed must be accomplished in the name of the Sovereign People, the President serving the purpose of the executive agent, as responsible for his own conduct as the Ministers themselves are held to be for theirs. These and other reforms, all tending to the prompt and complete establishment of pure Republican Institutions, will be at once submitted to your deliberations.

"I have not the slightest doubt that the moment the news of all that is passing within these walls, shall reach the ears of the other potentates of Italy, remonstrances will be poured in by their diplomatic agents resident in Montoni;—and perhaps even menaces may be used. I however feel convinced that no argument which may be adopted in such remonstrances can possibly blind your eyes to the beauty of Freedom and the excellence of Liberty: and as for the menaces, I need only observe that a Casteleician army, animated by a republican spirit, would prove invincible."

These words again elicited the most tremendous cheering; and after another long pause, Ricardo wound up his address in the following manner:—

"All of you who are here present well remember the condition of the country previously to the accession of the late Grand Duke. Poverty, and its invariable handmaids—squalor, filth, and demoralisation—presided over the lot of the industrious classes. Oppression was felt everywhere—happiness existed only in the mansions of a favoured few. The people were looked upon as the serfs and slaves of the rich oligarchy; and the very vitals of a healthy state of society were thus corrupt and rotten. But a change came over the country: it was decreed that every man should have fair wages for fair work; and that all able and willing to work, should have work found for them. In order to accomplish these aims, it was necessary to set about reclaiming the waste lands in those districts where they lay; and in others, the owners of estates were by a just law compelled to throw certain portions of their parks and pleasure-grounds into a corn cultivation, and to level all their game-preserves for the same purpose. What have been the results of these measures? Labour has been abundant, and wages high: employment has extirpated mendicancy; and squalor, filth, and demoralisation exist no longer within the confines of Casteleicala. But what would I have you infer from these facts? That if the people of this country have already so largely and so admirably profited by liberal institutions,—if the reforms hitherto accomplished have so materially enhanced the general prosperity, producing abundance, happiness, and contentment,—who shall be able to divine to what point that prosperity may arrive, under the pure, simple, and truly Christian institutions of republicanism."

Having thus spoken, with the tone, manner, and eloquence of deep conviction, General Markham—(for so we must now denominate him)—bowed to the assembly, and withdrew amidst applause which

was prolonged for some minutes after he had quitted the spacious hall.

His wife and illustrious relatives left the platform at the same time;—and now behold this illustrious family returning to the palace, attended by the grateful and rejoicing myriads, who, having assembled round the Chamber, had already received the intelligence of the memorable proceedings that had taken place within,—proceedings which in a single hour had accomplished the most effectual and yet utterly bloodless revolution ever known in any age or in any country!

CHAPTER CXCIX.

THE MARCHIONESS OF DELMOUR.

THE Marquis of Delmour awoke, as it were from a deep trance; and, opening his languid eyes, he beheld a female form bending over him. He attempted to speak: but the lady placed one slender finger on her lips in token of silence;—and, closing his eyes again, the old nobleman endeavoured to collect his scattered ideas—or rather, to dispel the mist which hung over them.

It struck him that the countenance which he had just seen was not unknown to him;—and as he dwelt upon it in imagination, it gradually became more familiar,—while, by imperceptible degrees, it awoke reminiscences of the past—some of pleasure, but most of pain,—until an idea of the real truth dawned in upon the mind of the Marquis.

Then again he opened his eyes;—and though long years had elapsed since last he beheld that countenance, each feature—each lineament was immediately recognised. But so confused were his thoughts that he could not recollect why a feeling of aversion and repugnance prevented him from experiencing joy at the presence of her who was standing, in painful suspense, by his bed-side.

At last, as reason asserted her empire, a knowledge of who she was and all the incidents associated with her revived in his soul; while, at the same time and with a species of under-current of the reflections, a feeling of what had happened to himself and why he was stretched in his couch came slowly upon him. Then he suddenly raised his hand to his throat; and the bandage there convinced him that the last reminiscence which had just stolen into his mind, was indeed too true!

Averting his eyes from the mournful and plaintive countenance which was still bending over him, he groaned aloud in very bitterness:—and then a deep silence ensued in the chamber.

Several minutes elapsed, during which the burning tears streamed down the lady's face: but she subdued the sobs that almost choked her—for she would not for worlds permit any evidence of her own deep grief to disturb the meditations of the enfeebled nobleman. On his side, he was absorbed in profound thought,—the incidents of the past rapidly becoming more definite and vivid in his memory, until there were few things left in uncertainty or doubt—and nothing in oblivion.

Slowly turning towards the lady, the Marquis saw that she was overwhelmed with sorrow—although she hastily wiped away her tears;—and moved—deeply moved by this spectacle, as well as influenced by a host of tender recollections, the old man extended his hand towards her, murmuring,

"My wife! is it indeed she who is now watching by my side?"

"O heaven! he recollects me—he will forgive me!" she exclaimed, in a tone of the liveliest joy; and carrying her husband's emaciated hand to her lips, she covered it with kisses.

"Sophia," said the old man, in a low voice and speaking with difficulty, "we meet after a long—long separation. But let us forget the past——"

"Is it possible that *you* can forget it?" asked Mrs. Sefton—or rather the Marchioness of Delmour; and bending her burning face over his hand which she still retained in both her own, she added in a tone so low that it seemed as if she feared even to hear her own words, "You have so much to pardon! But I never viewed my conduct in this light until I came and beheld you stretched upon the bed of—of——"

"Of death," said the Marquis, his pale countenance becoming, if possible, more ghastly pallid still.

"No—no," exclaimed the Marchioness, with the excitement of voice and the gesture of despair: "you must not talk nor think thus despondingly! But tell me, my husband—tell me—oh! say, can you forgive me for the past?"

"We have much to forgive on either side, Sophia," responded the Marquis: "and as I was the first cause of dissension between us—as I indeed was the author of all your unhappiness, by forcing you into a marriage which you abhorred—'tis for me to demand pardon first. Tell me, then, Sophia—tell me that you *can* pardon me for all the misery I have been the wretched means of heaping upon your head?"

"Oh! yes—yes!" exclaimed the lady, the tears again pouring in torrents down her cheeks: "would to heaven that I could prove to you how deeply sensible I am of this kindness which you now manifest towards me!"

"Then you forgive me!" cried the nobleman, pressing her hand tenderly, while joy beamed in his eyes hitherto dim with the glazing influence of a mortal enervation:—"then you forgive me!" he repeated, his voice becoming stronger.

"Yes—oh! yes—a thousand times *yes!*" she exclaimed; and bending over him, she pressed her lips upon his cold forehead. "But do you pardon me likewise?" she asked, after a few moments' pause.

"It was I who provoked all that has occurred—I who was the unhappy means of blighting the pure affections of your youth," returned the Marquis; "and therefore—whatever may have been the consequences—I am bound to pardon and forget. Alas! Sophia, often and often—and with feelings of ineffable pain and anguish—have I thought of that fatal day when, long years ago, I levelled at you a terrible accusation. But I was a coward—and I was cruel thus to have taxed you with a fault which at that period my jealous suspicions alone——"

"To what do you allude?" demanded the Marchioness, inwardly shocked, and with her heart bleeding as she asked the question: for she divined too well to what her husband *did* allude—and she was almost crushed with a devouring sense of shame.

"Oh! if you can have forgotten that fatal day," exclaimed the Marquis, whose sight was too dim, and whose mental powers of perception were too weak to enable him to understand rightly his wife's present emotions,— "then are you happy indeed!"

For, alas! I referred to the day on which we separated, sixteen or seventeen years ago—I cannot now remember accurately how many have passed since then——"

"And why allude to that unhappy epoch?" asked the lady, in a low and tremulous tone.

"Because I wish to convince you that I am indeed repentant for all the share which I took in sealing our misery," replied the nobleman. "On that memorable day, I accused you of infidelity towards me—and yet subsequent reflection has convinced me that you were innocent *then!* Oh! never—never shall I forget that tone in which you breathed the fatal words—'*All is now at an end between you and me! We part—for ever!*' I have thought since—aye, and I have said that you resembled what would be a sculptor's or an artist's conception of *Injured Innocence*; and then, when I adjured you in the name of your infant daughter to stay, you uttered a wild cry and fled! That cry rings in my ears now—has vibrated in my brain ever since——"

"Oh! in the name of heaven, proceed not thus!" murmured the Marchioness, covering her face with her hands and sobbing bitterly.

But wherefore did she thus weep?—wherefore were her emotions so powerful? Why was her heart thus wrung until every fibre appeared to be stretched to its utmost power of tension? It was because on the occasion to which the Marquis referred, *guilt* and not *innocence* had made her voice hollow and thick as she breathed the words which decreed an eternal separation!—it was because that wild cry had been wrung from her by the appeal that was made in the name of the infant child whom she knew to be the offspring of her amour with Sir Gilbert Heathcote! But there are times when *Conscious Guilt* so much resembles *Injured Innocence*, that the most keen observer may be deceived;—and such was the fact in the case now alluded to.

A long pause ensued—during which the Marquis, still totally ignorant of the real nature of his wife's emotions, gazed upon her with an affectionate interest that was rapidly growing into a resuscitated love.

"Weep not, dearest," he at length said;—"weep not, I implore you!"

"I weep, because I feel that I am so completely unworthy of your present kindness," responded the Marchioness, withdrawing her hands from her face, and bending her tearful eyes with an expression of such mournfulness and such profound penitence upon her husband, that had he the power to raise himself in the bed, he would have snatched her to his bosom.

"It is now my turn to implore you not to dwell longer upon the past," he said, taking one of her hands and conveying it to his lips. "We have promised mutual forgiveness. You have pardoned me for forcing you into a marriage which caused all your unhappiness: and I have pardoned you for your connexion with Sir Gilbert Heathcote since the period of our separation. This is the understanding between us, Sophia—and now we are friends again. But tell me, my dear wife—tell me how long I have been stretched on this bed, and how you came thus to be here to minister unto me?"

"Four days have elapsed since you—since——" began the Marchioness, hesitating how to allude to the dreadful attempt at suicide which her husband had committed.

"Oh! name not the horrible deed!" he groaned forth, writhing in anguish.

"But it is not known—save to three or four persons," hastily observed his wife, well aware that this assurance would prove consolatory.

"Heaven be thanked!" murmured the old nobleman, clasping his hands fervently. "And now tell me, my dear Sophia, how you came to learn the shocking intelligence?"

"If you will compose yourself as much as you can, and speak but little, I will explain every thing to you," she answered, assuming, with captivating tenderness of tone and manner, the position of wife and nurse.

"One word first!" exclaimed the Marquis. "Agnes—"

"Is here—beneath your roof," was the reply.

"My daughter again near me!" he murmured, joy animating his countenance; but in another moment a cloud overspread his features, as he said hesitatingly, "Does she know of the dreadful attempt that I made upon my life?"

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated the Marchioness, shocked at the bare idea. "That circumstance has been religiously withheld from her. She is however now aware that she is the daughter of the Marquis of Delmour, and not of plain Mr. Vernon; and she believes you to be dangerously ill. She has indeed been my companion for hours together by your bed-side—"

"Dearest Agnes!" exclaimed the nobleman, with an effusion of tenderness in his tone. "I will see her presently—when I am more composed," he added. "And now give me the promised explanations relative to all I have asked you."

"Listen, then, my dear husband—and do not interrupt me. You have already spoken too much, considering your depressed and enfeebled state; and Sir John Lascelles, when he calls again, will be angry with me for permitting you to use such exertions. Oh! you know not how kind—how attentive he has been! But you will shortly have an opportunity of thanking him with your own lips—for he will be here in an hour. Though the room be darkened, it is now about eleven o'clock in the morning; and he will call at noon. Compose yourself, therefore; and I will give you all the details you require."

The Marchioness arranged her husband's pillows—kissed his forehead once more—and then, seating herself by his bed-side, proceeded as follows:—

"That excellent young nobleman, Lord William Trevelyan, called upon me a few days ago, in consequence of an interview which he had had with you. It was relative to Agnes. I assured him that Sir Gilbert Heathcote and myself had come to an understanding that we should see each other no more; and I likewise informed Lord William that it was my intention to repair with Agnes to the Continent. But after he had taken his departure, I reflected profoundly upon the plans I had somewhat too hastily determined to adopt;—and another project suggested itself. For you may believe me when I solemnly avow that all my solicitude was relative to Agnes. Her present happiness and her future welfare in the world alone occupied my attention. Thus was it that the thought stole into my mind, of how unfortunate it was for her to be separated from the father whom she loved so well, and how prejudicial to her interests the equivocal position of her mother was likely to become. Then

I resolved to see you—to throw myself upon your mercy—to implore forgiveness for the past—and to beseech you that we might all dwell once again beneath the same roof! For I reflected that as you had shown so much forbearance in never appealing to the courts of justice to divorce me legally—and as you had rather manifested every inclination to envelope in secrecy the causes of our unfortunate differences,—the conviction gained upon my mind that you were generous enough to be capable of still farther sacrifices for the sake of Agnes. Oh! you can comprehend a mother's solicitude, my dear husband—"

"Yes—yes: proceed!" exclaimed the Marquis, powerfully affected.

"Well—animated with the hopes inspired by all these considerations," resumed the Marchioness, "I passed the night in meditating upon the best course to adopt in order to procure an interview with you,—an interview after so long a separation! At length I determined to pen a brief note, stating that family affairs of the utmost importance to us both had induced me to take this step; and a letter to that effect did I accordingly write on the following morning. But when I had completed this much of my task, another idea struck me,—which was to become the personal bearer of my own note. I will now candidly admit that I shrank from undertaking a task which might appear to you to evince a matchless audacity and presumption; but when I thought of Agnes, I resolved to risk any mortification or shame which could possibly be inflicted upon me."

"Oh! no mortification—no shame!" cried the nobleman. "Would to heaven that you had only come in time to — to —"

"Hush!" exclaimed the Marchioness, placing her finger upon her lip: "you promised that you would listen, without exerting yourself to speak."

"Proceed, dearest," said the Marquis, who all this while had one of his wife's hands locked in his own.

"Summoning all my courage to my aid," she resumed, "I resolved on presenting myself at your abode. I arrived—I sent up the letter by your valet; but in a few minutes he came rushing down the stairs with a countenance that had horror depicted in every lineament. I shall not however dwell upon this portion of my adventure. You may probably conjecture how dreadful was my alarm—how great my grief, when I learnt from the broken sentences in which the man spoke, the frightful intelligence of the condition in which he had found you. Then I revealed to him who I was; and, recovering my presence of mind, bade him place a seal on his lips with regard to every one save the doctor, whom I dispatched him to fetch. In a few moments I was with you: I stanch'd the blood—I did all that an unassisted and inexperienced woman could do in such a case. Sir John Lascelles arrived—and the information he gave me; after inspecting the wound, was reassuring. I then resolved to remain with you; and I sent the valet to fetch Agnes. This is all the explanation that I have to give;—unless indeed I should add that I communicated with Lord William Trevelyan, who, as a generous friend and as the intended husband of Agnes—"

"Has he visited this chamber?" asked the old nobleman, hastily.

"Yes," was the reply. "Considering that he was

alike in your confidence and in mine, I did not think it either grateful or prudent to leave him unacquainted with all that had occurred. The secret therefore rests with him, the good physician, the valet, and myself; and the household generally believes that you were found in a fit, which has been followed by a dangerous illness."

"My dearest wife," said the Marquis, after a long pause, "were there no circumstances which compelled me, as an honest man, to ask your pardon for the past, in the same way as you have demanded and obtained my forgiveness,—all that you have now told me would efface from my memory every thing that it had ever cherished to your prejudice. The delicacy you have displayed—your generosity—your watchfulness—"

"Nay—I cannot permit you thus to exert yourself," interrupted the Marchioness, placing her hand upon his mouth.

"But you *must* permit me to declare how deep is the gratitude that I experience for your conduct towards me," he said. "Oh! my beloved wife—for so I must again call you—I was mad at the time when I laid violent hands upon myself!"

"Oh! speak not of *that*!" exclaimed the lady. "My God! was it in consequence of that last interview which you had with Trevelyan—"

"No—no," interrupted the Marquis: "do not blame yourself in any way! It was *not* on account of the determination which you had expressed, and which he explained to me, to retain Agnes in your care. No—alas! a far less worthy cause—But tell me," he exclaimed, suddenly checking himself, as an idea struck him: "has there been any communication made from my bankers—"

"Do not harass yourself with matters of business," said the Marchioness, in a tone expressive of the deepest solicitude.

"Nay—if I am to endure the tortures of suspense, I shall never recover," exclaimed the nobleman, with strong emphasis. "Besides, I see by your manner that something *has* occurred, Sophia—"

"Well—I will explain every thing," said the Marchioness; "and then your mind will be relieved: for I see that it is useless to expect you to compose yourself while any cause of vexation or excitement exists. Tranquillise your mind, therefore, relative to the matter which is now uppermost in your thoughts. Your honour has been duly cared for—no exposure has given existence to shame or humiliation."

"Oh! again—again I thank you, my generous wife," cried the Marquis. "But pray give me an explanation of all this!"

"I will do so without farther preface," she said. "In the course of the day following the mournful one whose chief incident made me an inmate of the house to which I only came in the first instance as a visitor, the principal partner in the banking firm in the Strand called with an earnest request to see you immediately. In pursuance of certain orders which I had given to the servants relative to any visitors who might come upon business, I was immediately made acquainted with the banker's presence; and I hastened to the room where he was waiting. I assured him that you had been seized with a sudden fit, and were unable to see any one; and, as I had already made myself known in the house as your wife, I informed him that I was the Marchioness of Delmour. He said that it was of

the greatest consequence for him to see you; and I replied that you were insensible to all that was passing around you. He appeared much annoyed—indeed bewildered by this announcement; and I conjured him to be candid with me. He then stated that a forgery had been committed upon the bank, your name having been already used to procure the sum of sixty thousand pounds; that the legitimate owner of the cheque had just called to obtain the cash, and was actually waiting at the bank at that instant; and that he himself had come to require final instructions from *you*, as the lady was resolute in enforcing her demand. Pardon me, my husband," continued the Marchioness, "if I tell you I suspected that the affair was one which you would be unwilling to have exposed; and, indeed, on a little farther conversation with the banker, I heard sufficient to convince me that such was the fact. I accordingly took it upon myself to desire him to effect a compromise with the lady in question: but she being obstinate, he paid the entire amount. This result he subsequently called to communicate to me; and I hope that you will at least approve of my motives, if not of the instructions that I gave."

"I approve of both," answered the Marquis; "and I again thank you, Sophia, for the delicacy which you have exhibited in my behalf."

At this moment a knock at the door of the chamber was heard; and Sir John Lascelles immediately afterwards made his appearance.

The worthy physician was much delighted at the sudden and unexpected improvement which had manifested itself in his patient: and, after a few inquiries of a purely professional nature, he turned towards the Marchioness, saying, "To her ladyship, my lord, are you indebted for your life. Her prompt attention and the singular presence of mind with which she adopted the proper—indeed, the only effectual course, immediately after the discovery of your alarming condition—saved your lordship from a speedy death. During the four days and four nights which have elapsed since the occurrence," continued Sir John Lascelles, alluding as delicately as he could to the attempted suicide, "her ladyship has been constant and unwearied in her attendance at your bed-side. In order to retain the sad secret within as narrow a circle as possible, her ladyship would not even permit a nurse to be engaged;—but, unassisted, she has sustained all the cares—all the anxieties—and all the fatigues inevitably associated with daily watchings and long vigils. Pardon me, madam, for speaking thus enthusiastically; but, throughout my experience, which embraces a lengthened series of years, I never—never beheld such devotion."

"I thank you, doctor," said the nobleman, "for dwelling with such emphasis upon conduct as noble as it is generous. Certain differences—trifling in reality, and all in consequence of faults on *my* side," continued the Marquis, "had long kept us apart. But we are now reunited, never again to separate until Death shall lay his hand upon me. Doctor," added the nobleman, after a short pause, "while the Marchioness was weeping through deep emotion,—should you ever hear any one allude to our protracted separation, I beg—I implore you to declare, upon the authority of my own avowal, that I alone was the offending party, and that her ladyship has generously forgiven me every thing."

"I shall not wait to hear people allude to this matter, ere I myself broach the subject, in order to

volunteer that explanation," said Sir John Lascelles, who, firmly believing all that the Marquis had uttered, naturally considered that the most ample justice should be done towards a lady who had exhibited such a noble devotion to her husband under such peculiar circumstances.

When the physician had taken his leave, after prescribing certain medicines and giving the instructions necessary in the case, the Marchioness bent over her husband, and with deeply blushing countenance, said, "If there were anything at all deserving of praise in my conduct, yours is beyond all commendation: for I have merely performed a duty—whereas you have proved yourself to be the most generous of men. Oh! how can I ever sufficiently thank you, my dear husband, for having thus disarmed scandal of its weapons—thereby saving my honour even from the faintest breath of suspicion? And in order to do this, you have taken upon yourself the odium which attaches itself to the separation of man and wife."

"I need—I deserve no thanks," said the Marquis. "You have saved my life—you have recalled me to existence: to you am I indebted for that leisure which, by God's mercy, may yet be afforded me wherein to repent of the heinous crime I have committed in laying violent hands upon myself. Sir John Lascelles goes much into society—he is intimate in all the first houses at the West End: and he will be careful to propagate the intelligence which I gave him. You may therefore hold up your head proudly, Sophia: for your secret is also retained within as narrow a circle as my own. And now as you have eased my mind on so many points, let me relieve you from any shadow of uncertainty that may hang over yours, in respect to the cause of this dreadful deed, the fatal results of which were averted only by your timely aid. It was through disappointment in respect to that very lady who presented herself at my bankers'—"

"Enough!" exclaimed the Marchioness: "we have already had too many painful revelations this day," she added, in a low and affectionate tone. "If you are now strong enough to see her, I will fetch Agnes to remain with us for a few minutes."

The Marquis joyfully assented; and Sophia, having arranged the collar of his linen in such a manner that the bandage on the throat could not be observed, quitted the room. She however almost immediately returned, followed by her daughter, who was overwhelmed with delight to find him whom she believed to be her father so much improved.

But when the Marchioness contemplated the heart-felt joy with which her husband welcomed Agnes to his arms, she was stricken with remorse at the deceit she was practising upon him,—permitting him to regard that beautiful girl as his own offspring! Could she, however, destroy an illusion which gave him so much delight, and was the source of so much happiness?—will our readers blame her for cherishing this secret in her own breast, instead of uselessly destroying the fabric of domestic peace which had once more been built up in that lordly mansion?

After this interview with Agnes, the Marquis shortly fell into a deep and refreshing slumber, which continued until the evening.

On the following morning he was so much farther improved, that when Trevelyan called, he insisted upon seeing that good young nobleman,

who was delighted beyond measure to find that such a signal change had taken place in his condition.

CHAPTER CC.

JACK RILY AND THE LAWYER'S CLERK.

It was about nine in the evening, and Mr. John Rily, *alias* the Doctor, was seated in his chamber at the house in Roupel Street, smoking his pipe and pondering upon the best mode of disposing of the Bank-notes that were in his possession.

He had seen by the newspapers that his late companion, Mrs. Mortimer, had died from the effects of the terrible punishment inflicted upon her by Vitriol Bob: but he had not observed any advertisement proclaiming the notes that had been derived from the forgery;—and the journals were likewise silent respecting the forgery itself.

The Doctor accordingly concluded that the fraud remained undetected, and that the legitimate cheque had not been presented; and as several days had now elapsed since the notes had found their way into his possession, he began seriously to meditate how he could convert them into gold.

It may seem a singular thing to some that a man having in his possession sixty thousand pounds' worth, was at a loss for the means to realise the amount: but such is often the predicament in which thieves are placed.

For thus stood the matter in respect to Jack Rily:—If he were to take a quantity of the notes to the Bank of England, his appearance might be so much against him as to excite suspicion: for he was not endowed with vanity sufficient to blind his eyes to the fact that his outward aspect was of the most villainously hang-dog description it was possible to conceive. Besides, he was not certain that the notes might not have been privately stopped. Again, i. he applied to the "fences" and receivers of stolen property with whom he was acquainted, he knew that they could not cash more than two or three thousand pounds' worth of the notes; and in doing even this much, they might mulct him of one-half the value. Besides, they were only to be trusted by men in such desperate circumstances as to leave no other alternative: whereas the Doctor had plenty of gold remaining from his share of the plunder derived from the adventure in the Haunted Houses. Lastly in the catalogue of difficulties now enumerated, Jack Rily had heard from a friend so much of the galloys in France, that he did not at all relish the idea of repairing to that country and standing the chance of visiting those places by attempting to pass notes concerning which private information might have been sent, for any thing he knew to the contrary, to the various money-changers.

All these considerations were occupying the Doctor's thoughts on the evening alluded to; when his landlord entered to acquaint him that a gentleman named Green desired to speak to him.

"Ah! my old school-pal!" ejaculated Rily, joyfully: "show him up by all means!"

And during the short interval which elapsed ere the attorney's clerk made his appearance, the Doctor placed the brandy-bottle, a couple of tumblers, and a clean pipe upon the table.

By the time these preparations were completed, Mr. Green entered the room, and was received with the familiarity of a long-standing acquaintance.

"Well, it is quite an age since I saw you last!" exclaimed the Doctor, as soon as his visitor was seated. "What have you been doing with yourself? Still drudging on at old Heathcote's?"

"Just the same—or rather worse," was the reply. "I'm sorry to hear that," observed the Doctor. "Come, help yourself. But how came you to find me out in my new quarters?"

"I was passing by here yesterday to serve a writ upon a poor devil in this street," answered Mr. Green, "and I twigged you at the window. You didn't see me: but I made up my mind to give you a call—and so here I am."

"And I feel devilish glad to see you," responded Jack Rily. "You may observe that my circumstances have improved a trifle or so, of late."

"Ah! I wish to heaven that *mine* would show any proof of amendment," said Green, with a profound sigh, as he helped himself to a tumbler of brandy-and-water. "I made a couple of hundred pounds the other day—it was an affair of giving information about a lunatic-asylum in which Heathcote had locked up his own brother;—and because I treated myself to this new suit of clothes," he added, glancing down at his dress, "the old villain declared that I must have robbed him to procure the money. Oh! how I long to be revenged on that man!"

"Well, I don't suppose it's so very difficult," observed Rily: "at least I should think, from all you have told me at different times, that you know enough about him to make him quake in his shoes."

"Yes—yes—but—then," stammered the clerk, with the hesitation of one who longs to open his heart to another, yet shrinks from the avowal of a villany even to the ears of a villain.

"But what?" demanded the Doctor, relighting his pipe. "If you've come to consult me, then out with everything at once. Do nothing by halves, old fellow—I never do."

"Well, you see—the truth is—that—I—I am in the man's power—completely in his power," responded Green: "and now he's making my life so wretched—oh! so wretched, that I think of running away to America with my two hundred pounds. But then I know that he would move heaven and earth to find me out; he would advertise me—give a description of my person—swear that I had robbed him, or something of that kind;—anything, indeed, would he do to revenge himself upon me. He is one of those despicable characters that cherish the bitterest—the most fiend-like malignity."

"And what is he doing to you now?" demanded Jack, smoking his pipe at his ease while his friend was thus pouring forth his complaints.

"What doesn't he do, you should rather ask me," exclaimed Green, in a tone of mingled rage, hate, and despair. "As I just now told you, he put his brother Sir Gilbert into a lunatic asylum, in the hope of getting into his own hands the management of all the baronet's property—and doubtless in the expectation likewise that grief would send the unfortunate gentleman to his last home. Well, Sir Gilbert escaped—"

"Through your connivance, eh?" interrupted the Doctor, with a knowing chuckle.

"Yes—with my connivance," responded Green; "and it is the suspicion of this fact that makes Heathcote so intolerable in his conduct towards

me. Besides, seeing me with a new suit of clothes, he swore that if I had not robbed him I must have been bribed to give information relative to the place where his brother was confined. It was all in vain that I reminded him of my salary being quite sufficient to keep me in decent attire—"

"Why, don't you see," again interrupted the Doctor,—"when once a man has got a certain suspicion into his head, he won't very easily part with it. He cherishes it—feeds upon it—sleeps upon it—dreams of it, just as a young girl does of her first love."

"I suppose that this must be the case," said Green. "At all events, I have been made so miserable by Heathcote for the last few days, that it was like a ray of hope when I saw you at the window of this room yesterday; and I determined to come and chat with you over the matter."

"And yet I don't see very well how I can assist you, since you declare that you are completely in Heathcote's power," observed Jack Rily. "But you must tell me every thing."

"Well—there's no use in denying, then, that Heathcote can transport me if he chooses," said Green. "Some years ago I—I—committed—a—a forgery—"

"Oh! that's nothing," exclaimed Jack, assuming a consolatory tone. "But go on."

"Nothing do you call it!" cried the clerk, looking apprehensively around him, as if he were fearful that the very walls had ears. "In a month's time a thousand pounds must be forthcoming—or I shall be transported. Up to this time Heathcote has all along given me to understand that he will replace the money for me: but this business of his brother's escape and two or three other matters that have gone wrong with him lately—"

"I understand you," said Jack Rily: "they have put the kyeboosh upon it."

"The what?" demanded Green, unskilled in slang phrases.

"Put a stopper on the affair, I mean," explained the Doctor, whom an idea had struck while his companion was talking; and this idea was that Mr. Green might be made instrumental in procuring cash for a considerable portion of the Bank-notes.

"I am indeed afraid that Heathcote will not assist me," pursued the wretched clerk; "and if he does not, I cannot say what will become of me. In fact there is no use in buoying myself up with the hope that Heathcote *will* do any thing for me: he himself has lost money lately in several ways—and moreover his temper is terribly soured by this affair about his brother."

"Is Sir Gilbert taking steps to punish him, then?" asked Jack.

"Oh! no—he is too generous and too forgiving in his disposition," replied Green: "but he has compelled the two surgeons who signed the certificate of insanity, to give him a counter-declaration—and indeed a confession to the effect that they were bribed to sign the document on the strength of which he was placed in the mad-house. There is consequently the danger of all this becoming known; and Heathcote, finding his reputation to be hanging to a thread, has grown as it were desperate,—not caring what may happen to himself—still less what may befall *me*."

"I should think, then, that if you had a thousand pounds, you would fancy yourself a very lucky

fellow, and be able to defy Heathcote altogether," observed Jack Rily.

"I would give the last ten years of my life to reach such happiness," said the clerk. "But it is useless—vain to hope—"

"Will you give a few hours of your time and a little of your ingenuity?" demanded the Doctor, now fixing upon him a look full of deep and mysterious meaning.

"Do not banter me—do not make a jest of my misfortune," exclaimed Green.

"By Satan! I never was more serious in my life," returned the Doctor. "Nay—you may stare at me as you will: but the thousand pounds are nearer within your reach than you fancy—and you might still keep your two hundred pounds for your own purposes."

"Pray explain yourself!" cried the clerk, not daring to yield to the hope which suddenly appeared to rise up before him. "Keep me not in suspense, I conjure you! Can you do anything for me?—can you put me into the way—"

"Yes—I can," answered the Doctor, emphatically. "And now you may as well tell me candidly that you thought I *might* be able to assist you, when you resolved upon calling here. Because, since we were at school together—which is many long years ago—our paths in life have been so different, that it is not very likely you would have honoured me by your company without some pressing motive."

"You must at the same time admit that whenever I have met you, I have always spoken civilly to you—and sometimes stood treat," added Green, diffidently.

"Once or twice," observed Jack. "But that don't matter one way or the other. I asked you a question: and before I open my mind any farther—"

"Well—I candidly admit, then," interrupted Green, wishing to bring the matter to the point as speedily as possible—"I candidly admit that I *did* hope you could help me in some way or another. But it was only the hope of a desperate man: for as to the idea that you could assist me to eight hundred or a thousand pounds, it would have been insane to harbour it even for an instant. To speak more frankly still, I almost thought of asking you to let me join you in your own way of life, although I hardly know what your pursuits positively are."

"They require courage and firmness, at all events," answered Jack Rily, with a coarse laugh; "whereas you have got into such cursed cringing, bowing, and scraping ways, that you are only fit for a toad-eater. Excuse me for speaking frankly—but as we are talking on matters of business—"

"Quite correct," interrupted Green, swallowing his resentment: for he felt but little pleased at the home-truth which had just been told him. "And now for the information which is to relieve me from such cruel suspense."

"First answer me one or two questions," said the Doctor. "I suppose you are often in the habit of changing Bank-notes for your master?"

"Yes: but not to any considerable amount at a time," answered Green: "he is too suspicious to trust me with a sum sufficiently large to tempt me to run away with it."

"Nevertheless, I suppose you could manage to change a few heavy notes, if you had them?" pursued the Doctor.

"Heavy notes?" repeated Green, turning pale and trembling. "Are they—fo—or—ged?"

"Not they!" exclaimed Rily, half disgusted with his timorous companion. "They are genuine Bank of England flimsies: but as they didn't come into my hands in a very regular manner, and as my appearance isn't altogether in my favour, I can't pass them myself."

"Oh! I—I—can get cash for them," said Green, with all the eagerness of a man in a desperate predicament. "Heathcote's bankers would do me as many as you can possibly have."

"I question it," observed the Doctor, drily. "Would they cash you two notes for a thousand each?"

"Yes—yes: assuredly they would," was the prompt answer.

"And you must know other places—"

"Several—several," interrupted Green, anticipating the remainder of the questions. "But would it not be shorter to go to the Bank of England at once?"

"Well—I think it would," responded Jack.

"Unless—unless—there's any fear—any danger, I mean—I—"

"Curse upon your fears and dangers!" ejaculated the hare-lipped villain, savagely: "there are none at all—only, as I just now said, I can't go myself. But if you can get ten thousand changed to-morrow, you may have one thousand for your own purposes."

Mr. Green could not find words to express his gratitude in return for this assurance: he was overwhelmed with a delight which he had not experienced for years. The thought of emancipating himself from the thralldom of his despot-master was too brilliant—too dazzling to gaze upon. He could not believe that there was anything beyond a mere chance in his favour:—that the matter was a certainty, he dared not imagine.

But when Jack Rily displayed a few of the notes, and mysteriously hinted that they were the produce of a forgery which could not possibly be detected, Mr. Green started from his chair, and actually danced for joy!

CHAPTER CCI.

MR. HEATHCOTE AND HIS CLERK.

It was five o'clock in the morning of the day after the interview described in the last chapter; and Mr. Heathcote was seated at the writing-table in his private office.

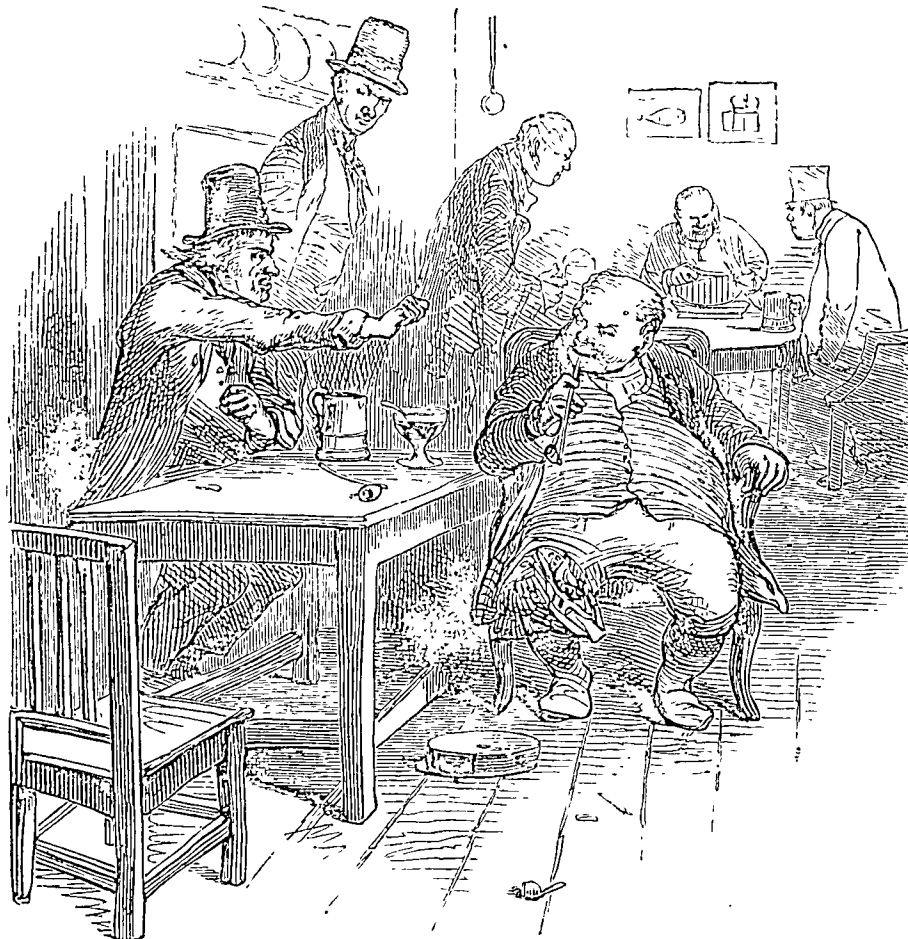
He was busily occupied with papers;—for his was a disposition that could not endure idleness. Even when vexed and annoyed—as he was at present—it was impossible for him to remain inactive. Had he been an author, he would have eclipsed Walter Scott or Paul de Kock in the number of his works.

There was a deep gloom upon his brow and a sinister light in his restless eyes, as he bent over the parchment-deeds which he was inspecting; and from time to time he cast an anxious glance towards the door.

At length he rang the bell; and the junior clerk answered the summons.

"Has not Mr. Green made his appearance yet?" demanded the lawyer, with an emphasis on the last word.

"No, sir—he has not," was the reply, given timidly—for the young man beheld both the gloom on the brow and the gleaming in the eye.



"Not yet!" ejaculated Heathcote, fiercely, and frowning in his own peculiar fashion at the same time. "Nor sent either?" he added, interrogatively.

"No, sir," responded the junior clerk.

"This is strange—very strange," murmured the lawyer. "He can't be ill—poor devils like him cannot afford to be unwell. But if he were,—if he *did* happen to be so indisposed that he couldn't shut his eyes to the fact,—he would have sent word. You know where he lives?" demanded Mr. Heathcote, abruptly addressing himself to the young man.

"Yes, sir," was the answer.

"Then go to his lodgings directly," exclaimed the lawyer, in an imperious tone; "and if you find him at home, tell him that I am very angry indeed at his absence. Should he be ill, you must desire him to get out of bed, take a cab, and come to me at once to give an account of his conduct. Two guineas a-week, indeed, to a fellow who takes it into his head to be ill!"

And with this humane reflection Mr. Heathcote was about to resume his work, while the young

clerk was turning towards the door, when Mr. Green suddenly made his appearance.

"Oh! you are come at last, sir—are you?" cried the lawyer, glancing up at the clock. "A quarter past five—and the office hours are from nine till six. What the deuce does this mean, sir?"

"I had a little business to transact, sir," answered the head clerk, closing the door by which the junior functionary had just evaporated.

"A little business!" repeated Mr. Heathcote, staring at the man in unfeigned amazement: for he could not possibly conceive how Mr. Green should have any affairs of his own to attend to.

"Yes, sir—a little business," returned the head clerk, who, though now feeling comparatively independent of his master could not shake off an obsequiousness of manner, which had become habitual to him. "Is it strange, sir, that for once in a way I should have taken the holiday which was certain to be refused if solicited beforehand?"

"Have you been drinking, Mr. Green—or are you mad—to talk to me in this style?" demanded Heathcote, surveying his clerk with more than usual attention.

"I have had nothing to drink, sir, beyond a single glass of sherry—and I beg to inform you that I am not crazy," answered the head clerk, growing a trifle bolder.

"A glass of sherry!" repeated Heathcote, again evincing the most unfeigned astonishment. "How is it possible, sir, that you can indulge in such extravagances and pay for them honestly? A few days ago you ventured to appear before me in a new suit of clothes, with the gloss actually on them—whereas your regular office-suit had not been thread-bare more than two years. Let me tell you, sir, that I take note of these things: I observe the most minute symptoms of change in a man's character or habits; and no one can deceive me, Mr. Green—no one can deceive me," repeated the lawyer, looking hard at the individual whom he thus addressed, as much as to say that he had suspected something wrong and was now certain of it.

"Well, sir—and who has attempted to deceive you?" asked Green, in a bolder tone than had ever yet characterised his language when in the presence of his hitherto dreaded master.

"Who has attempted to deceive me!" vociferated Heathcote, his lips becoming white and quivering with rage. "You, sir—you have made the endeavour—you are making it now! But it will not do, Mr. Green—it will not do. Take care of yourself! New suits of clothes—sherry—a day's absence without leave, and even without the humble apology that should mark your return,—all this is suspicious, sir—very suspicious, let me tell you."

"Suspicious of what?" demanded the head clerk, approaching Mr. Heathcote's desk, and looking steadily across it at that gentleman.

"That you were either bribed in my brother's affair—or that you have robbed me," was the immediate answer.

"You are a liar, sir—a deliberate liar," exclaimed Green, now beginning to experience the first feelings of exultation at the independence which he was enabled to assert.

The lawyer could make no reply: he was amazed—bewildered—stupefied!

"Yes, sir," continued Green, his voice now losing all its obsequiousness and his manner rising completely above servility—"you are a liar if you say that I robbed you! Where was the chance, even if I had possessed the inclination, of pilfering even a single farthing? You know that you reckon up the office-money to the very last penny—and that if I tell you how a box of lucifers, or a piece of tape, or any other trifling article was required, you were always sure to say we were very extravagant in that front-office. These are truths, sir; and therefore how dare you pretend to believe in the possibility of my robbing you?"

"Mr. Green—Mr. Green," exclaimed Heathcote, absolutely frightened at his head clerk's manner: "what is the cause of all this excitement?"

The lawyer was frightened, we say,—because his conscience told him that something had occurred to place Mr. Green upon a more independent footing with regard to him; and the greater became such independence on the part of one who had long been his tool and instrument, the less secure was the lawyer himself in his own position. In fact, when a wretched being who had long grovelled in the dust at his feet, suddenly started up and dared to look him in the face,—it was a sign that the fabric of despotism was shaken and was tottering

to its fall. Mr. Heathcote felt all this—and he trembled for a moment,—trembled with a cold and death-like shudder, as he beheld his clerk's eyes glaring savagely at him; and it was under the influence of this sensation that he uttered the words which, by proving his own weakness, gave Green additional courage.

"You ask what is the cause of all this excitement," exclaimed the latter: "and yet only a few minutes have elapsed since you dared to accuse me of having robbed you."

"A man who has committed a forgery, may very well be suspected of theft," returned Heathcote, who, having recovered his presence of mind, answered with his usual brutality of manner.

"And what may you not be accused of, then?" demanded Green, scarcely able to restrain himself from flying like a tiger-cat at his master: "for what have you not committed?"

"By heaven, Mr. Green, this shall last no longer!" ejaculated Heathcote, starting from his seat: "you are drunk, sir—you have been drinking, I tell you. Come—be reasonable," he continued, almost in a coaxing tone: "go home quietly—and be here early in the morning to make an apology for your present bad conduct. I promise to forgive you."

"Forgive me!" repeated Green—"forgive me!" he exclaimed again, with a chuckling laugh which did Mr. Heathcote harm to hear it: "I have done nothing, sir, that needs forgiveness—and if I was to kick you thrice round this room where you have tyrannised over me for twelve years, it would only be paying back a minute portion of all I owe you."

"Mr. Green, you will provoke me to do some thing desperate," retorted Heathcote, in a low thick tone, as he approached his head clerk to read in that individual's countenance the solution of his present enigmatical conduct. "you will provoke me, I say—and then you will be sorry for your rashness. Consider—reflect—in another month's time the thousand pounds must positively be forthcoming—"

"Will you replace it for me?" demanded Green, abruptly.

"You know what I have always said—"

"Yes—and I now know likewise what you have always meant," interrupted Green, darting a look full of malignant hate and savage spite at the lawyer. "For twelve long years, sir, I have been your slave—your vile and abject slave. I was a criminal, it is true, when I first came to you—for I had committed that forgery which you detected, and which placed me in your power. But I had still the feelings of a man—whereas you soon imbued me with such ideas and reduced me to such a miserable state of servitude, that I have wept bitter, bitter tears at the thought of my own deep degradation. I could have lied for you—I could have committed perjury for you—I could have performed all the meanest and condescended to do all the vile and low trickery which form part and parcel of your business:—but when I found myself used as a mere tool and instrument and treated like a spaniel, without ever having a single kind word uttered to cheer me beneath a yoke of crushing despotism—"

"You have had two guineas a week, paid with scrupulous regularity," interposed Heathcote, who, from the tenour of the observations which Green had just made, began to fancy that he was only excited by liquor to make vague and general com-

plaints, but that he was still as much in his power as ever.

"Two guineas a-week!" repeated the man, indignantly: "you are always dining that fact in my ears. But heaven knows that were my salary six times as much, it would not repay me for all the cruelty I have endured at your hands—nor for all that one is obliged to see and go through while in your employment. I had some tender feelings once: but they have long ago been stifled by the horrible spectacle of woe and misery which have been forced upon my sight, and which have sprung from your detestable covetousness. I have seen children starving—mothers weeping over their dying babes—while the fathers and husbands have been languishing in gaol,—yes, in the debtor's gaol where you have thrown them, and where some of them have died, cursing the name of James Heathcote! Yes, sir—I have seen all this: and what is more—aye, and worse, too—far worse—I have been an involuntary instrument, as your clerk, in causing much of that awful misery, the mere thought of which almost drives me mad. Talk of the black turpitude of murdering with a dagger or a pistol!—why, it is a mercy to the slow—lingering—piecemeal murders which you and men of your stamp are constantly perpetrating. *For as true as there is a God in heaven, there are more slow and cold-blooded murders committed in one year by a certain class of attorneys, than are recorded in the annals of Newgate for a whole century!*"

Heathcote's fears had all returned by rapid degrees as his head clerk, turning full upon him, levelled at his head the terrible charges summed up in the preceding speech: but when those last words fell upon his ear, he grew ghastly pale, and, staggering back a few paces, sank into his chair,—for he knew how sternly true was the appalling accusation!

"Ah! well may your eyes glare upon me in horror," resumed Green: "but it is high time that you should hear a few home truths—even though they come from such lips as mine. For you doubtless think that it is all very fine to issue a writ—refuse delay—decline everything in the shape of compromise—and then seize upon the goods of your victim, or clap him into gaol:—but it is we who sit in the outer office—we clerks, who can best penetrate into the effects of such a heartless course. When we see the door open, and the miserable wretch come in with care as legibly written on his countenance as if it were printed in letters on a piece of paper,—and when he comes crawling up to our desk, as if his utter self-abasement would be so pleasing to us clerks as to induce us to say a good word in his behalf to you,—then, when he asks in a tone of anguish which is ready to burst forth into a flood of tears, 'Do you think it likely that Mr. Heathcote will give me time?'—it is then, I say, that the real feelings of such poor wretches transpire, and the murderous effects of the harsh proceedings adopted by lawyers of your stamp become painfully apparent."

"To what is all this to lead, Mr. Green?" demanded Heathcote, in a low and subdued tone: for it struck him that such a long address could only be meant to herald some evil tidings, to which his clerk, in the rehnement of vindictive cruelty, sought to impart a more vivid poignancy by pre-fatory delays.

"To what is all this to lead?" repeated Green:

"why—to your utter confusion, black-hearted old man that you are! Think of the conversation that took place between us a few days ago: did I not then tell you that there were many deaths to be laid to your door? And I was right! You sent off Thompson to prison—his wife and child perished, and he cut his throat:—you are the murderer of those three human beings! The man Beale, whom you likewise threw into Whitecross Street, died in the infirmary of that gaol—died of a broken heart, sir;—and you were his murderer! Hundreds and hundreds of deaths have you caused in the same way,—hundreds and hundreds of legal murders!"

"Green—Mr. Green!" gasped the lawyer, writhing as if he were a dwarf in the grasp of a giant: then, wondering why he should thus put up with the insolence of his clerk, and falling back upon the belief that the man could not possibly conduct himself in such a way unless he were under the influence of liquor, he suddenly started from his seat, exclaiming, "By heaven! sir, you have gone so far that all hope of forgiveness on my part is impossible."

"I care nothing for your pardon—and shall not even condescend to solicit it," replied Mr. Green, in a tone of complete and unmistakeable defiance. "I am going to leave you at once—"

"Leave me!" ejaculated Heathcote, who had hitherto believed it to be impossible that his clerk could throw off the chains of servitude and thralldom which had been so firmly rivetted upon him: "leave me!" he repeated: "yes—oh! yes," he added, his countenance assuming an expression of the most diabolical sardonism;—"yes—you shall indeed leave me—but it will be to change your quarters for a cell in Newgate!"

"Perhaps you will be the first to repair thither," said Green, with a chuckle that seemed to grate upon the lawyer's ears like the sound emitted by the process of sharpening the teeth of a saw.

"In less than two hours, Mr. Green, Clarence Villiers shall be made acquainted with the fact that the thousand pounds have long ceased to be in the Bank of England," exclaimed Heathcote.

"The thousand pounds are there, sir—yes, there at this very minute," answered Green, in a tone of assurance which convinced Heathcote that the man was speaking the truth. "And what is more, sir, Mr. Villiers knows all—and has forgiven all! This morning did I replace the money; this afternoon did I repair to Brompton to throw myself at the feet of Mr. Villiers—confess everything—and implore his pardon. Oh! sir, he is a generous man—and he forgave me. 'You have been guilty of a terrible breach of trust—nay, a heinous crime, Mr. Green,' he said; 'but you have atoned for your turpitude. It is our duty in this world to forgive where true contrition is manifested; and I will take care to hold you harmless in this case, should it ever transpire that the money had been sold out.'—I wept while I thanked him; and I said, 'But I have a bitter enemy who is acquainted with the whole transaction: what can be done to save me from disgrace, should he inform against me?'—'He cannot prove that you forged my name,' responded Villiers: 'I alone can prove that; and under present circumstances, I would not for worlds inflict an injury upon you.' I again thanked him, and took my leave. You now perceive, Mr. Heathcote, that so far from being in your power, you are entirely in mine. The other day you told me that you would crush me as if I

were a worm—that you would send me to Newgate—that you would abandon me to my fate—and that you would even *help* to have me shipped for eternal exile. I thank you for all your kind intentions, sir," added Green, in a tone of bitter satire; "and I mean to show my gratitude by exposing you and your villany to the utmost of my ability."

"And what injury can *you* do me, reptile?" exclaimed Heathcote, quivering and furious with rage.

"What injury!" repeated Green: "I can ruin you!" he added, speaking loudly and triumphantly. "Oh! I am acquainted with far more of your dark transactions and nefarious schemes than you can possibly imagine. The deeds that are contained therein," he added, pointing to the japanned tin-boxes, "are not sealed books to me. I have read them all—yes, *all*—and have gleaned enough information to enable me to bring upon you such a host of ruined and defrauded clients, that you would never dare to face them even for a moment. Ah! you may turn pale as death—and your eyes may glare with rage: but it is not the less true that I hold you in my power. If you destroy those deeds, you then annihilate the only documents which prove your title to the vast property which you have accumulated: if you do not destroy them, you leave in existence the damning evidences of your villany. At this very moment there are old men and old women struggling on the bitterest penury, and cursing the life from which they have not the moral courage to fly through the medium of suicide,—some of them in the workhouse—others dependent on the bounty of relatives;—and all these have been plunged into this appalling misery by *you*! But every step you took to enmesh and ensnare them—every scheme you devised to get them completely into your power, so that you might wrench from them the last acre of their lands and the last guinea of their fortunes,—all—all has been illegal—fraudulent—extortionate—vile! Oh! it will alone prove a fine harvest for me, when I again take out my certificate to practise as an attorney—which I am about to do,—it will be a splendid commencement, I say, to take up the causes of all those persons and compel you to render an account to your ruined clients. This, sir, is what I am about to do; and now it shall be war between us—war to the very knife,—and ere many months have elapsed, you will bitterly repent your conduct to one who only asked for a little kindness in return for his faithful—far too faithful services."

Having thus spoken, Mr. Green abruptly quitted the office, leaving James Heathcote in a state of mind not even to be envied by a criminal about to ascend the steps of the scaffold.

CHAPTER CCH.

JACK RILY AND VITRIOL BOB.

MR. GREEN had so well managed matters in respect to the Bank-notes, that in the course of a few hours he had contrived to obtain cash for about twelve thousand pounds' worth; and the Doctor was so delighted at his success, that he had testified his satisfaction by making him a present of a couple of thousand for himself.

Being now a rich man, Mr. Rily resolved to quit his lodgings in Roupel-street and take superior

apartments in a better neighbourhood. Then it struck him, as he was walking leisurely along in the City, after having parted from Green, that it would be far more agreeable to become the possessor of a nice little cottage in a pleasant suburb; and, while this idea was uppermost in his mind, he happened to observe in the window of a house-agent an announcement to the effect that "several elegant and desirable villas were to be let on lease or sold, in the most delightful part of Pentonville." The Doctor entered the office, obtained a card to view the premises thus advertised, and, taking a cab, proceeded straight to the suburb indicated.

Having nothing particular to do, Jack Rily spent several hours in inspecting the villas, and at length fixed upon one which he resolved to purchase. The individual who had built the houses on speculation, and who was compelled to dispose of one on any terms before he could possibly finish another, resided close at hand; and a bargain being speedily concluded, a particular hour on the following day was there and then agreed upon as the time for a convenient and final settlement.

Jack Rily, having proceeded thus far in his arrangements, entered a public-house which had lately been built on an eminence within a quarter of a mile of the New Model Prison; and there he ordered some dinner—for it was now four o'clock in the afternoon. The repast over, he took a seat at an open window which commanded a view of Copenhagen Fields and all the neighbouring district; and with his pipe and some hot brandy-and-water he was enjoying himself to his heart's content, when he was suddenly startled by the appearance of Vitriol Bob, who happened to pass that way.

Though a brave, fearless, and desperate man, the Doctor nevertheless uttered an ejaculation of mingled surprise and annoyance; and his enemy, who would not have otherwise perceived him, instantly glanced towards the window. Their looks met—and a diabolical scowl distorted the countenance of Vitriol Bob,—while Jack Rily, immediately recovering his presence of mind, surveyed the miscreant from head to foot with cool defiance.

Vitriol Bob appeared to hesitate for a moment what course to pursue: then, suddenly making up his mind, he entered the public-house where the Doctor was seated.

Taking a chair at another table, he rang the bell and ordered some spirits-and-water, in payment for which he threw down a sovereign, receiving the change.

When the waiter had disappeared, and the two villains were alone together, Vitriol Bob looked maliciously at Jack Rily, as much as to say, "You see I am not without money;" and then he glanced complacently at the new suit of black which he had on.

For a change had taken place in Vitriol Bob's appearance; and he seemed to be "in high feather," as well as his enemy the Doctor. His huge black whiskers had been trimmed, oiled, and curled—a process that did not however materially mitigate the hang-dog expression of his countenance: for his small, reptile eyes still glared ferociously from beneath his thick, overhanging brows,—his lips were as usual of a livid hue,—and his repulsive, broken nose positively appeared, if that were possible, more flat on his face than ever.

"Your health, Jack," said the miscreant, nodding with a kind of malignant familiarity, as he raised the steaming glass to his almost parched lips.

"Thank'ee kindly, Bob," returned the Doctor, in a tone of mock civility.

"Now that we have met at last, old feller, we won't part again in a hurry," observed Vitriol Bob after a pause, during which he lighted a cigar.

"Just as you choose, my tulip," said Rily, calmly puffing away and contemplating the thin blueish vapour which curled lazily from the bowl of his pipe out of the window.

"You and I have a score to settle, you know, Jack," continued Vitriol Bob; "and it seems as if the Devil had thrown us in each other's way this evenin' on purpose to reggilate our accounts."

"Oh! that's the construction you put upon it, eh?" said the Doctor. "Well—just as you like."

"You know that you used me shameful in that Stamford-street business t'other day," proceeded Vitriol Bob.

"It was only what you deserved for the trick you played me, old fellow," retorted the Doctor, but with amazing coolness alike of tone and manner.

"I don't deny that I bilked you out of a part of your reglars in the matter alluded to," said Bob: "but it didn't deserve such a return as you gived me in the Haunted House. Thank God, I had my revenge on the old o'man t'other night."

"Yes—she's disposed of," observed Jack; "and I can't forgive you for it, Bob—even if you wished us to be friends. She was a fine old creature,—and I had an affection for her, because she was the ugliest wretch I ever saw in the shape of a woman—and her spirit was admirable."

"I meant the blow for you, Jack," said Vitriol Bob: "but it's just as well now that the bottle broke over her, since you and me have met again."

"Have you got another bottle in your pocket, Bob?" demanded the Doctor: "because if we are to have a tuzzle for it before we part, I may as well put myself on as equal terms with you as possible."

"I shan't take no unfair advantage, Jack," was the reply: and, as the villain thus spoke, he slapped his hands against the skirts of his coat, his breeches' pockets, and his breast, to convince his antagonist that he had no bottle about his person.

"There's nothing like fair play, Bob," returned the Doctor; "and therefore if you like to feel about me to convince yourself that I have no fire-arms, you're welcome."

"I'll take your word for it, Jack," responded Vitriol Bob. "But I suppose you have got a clasp-knife."

"I never go without one," was the answer: "and it's as sharp as a razor."

"So is mine," observed the other miscreant; and then there was a long pause, during which the two men contemplated each other with a calmness and serenity that would have prevented even the most acute observer from noticing the malignant light that gleamed in the depths of their eyes.

And while the one continued to puff his pipe in a leisurely manner, the other smoked his cigar with equal ease; so that they appeared to be two friends enjoying themselves in a pleasant way in the cool of the evening.

"I suppose I interrupted some sport t'other night, Jack," said Vitriol Bob, at length breaking the silence. "You and the old o'man wasn't out together at that hour for nothink—particklerly in each a neighbourhood."

"Yes—we were going to do a little business

together," observed the Doctor. "You first twigged me in Sloane Street. I saw you!"

"I knowed you did: but you didn't suspect that I follered you."

"Rather," said Jack Rily. "At least, I thought it very probable."

"You're aweer that the old o'man's dead, I suppose?"

"I said as much just now. 'Twas in the papers," remarked Jack Rily.

"Yes—I read it in the *Advertiser*," responded Vitriol Bob.

There was another pause, during which the two miscreants had their glasses replenished. The Doctor also refilled his pipe, and the other lighted a second cigar.

"We'll make ourselves comfortable, Jack," said Vitriol Bob, "as long as you like: and whenever you feel disposed to go, mind that I shall be arter you."

"Well—I can't prevent *that*," observed the Doctor, coolly. "You've a right to walk which way you choose in this free country."

"Thank'ee for giving me the information," said Bob, in a satirical tone. "But of course I mean to stick to you till you're so wearied of my company that you *must* come to a last struggle either to shako me off altogether, or perish yourself. For, mind, if I catch you asleep, Jack, I shall stick my clasp-knife into you up to the hilt."

"I'm obliged to you for letting me know your kind intentions beforehand," observed the Doctor: "because I shall adopt precisely the same mode of warfare."

"Now, then, we understand each other," said Vitriol Bob; "and that's a comfort. But it's a great pity that two such fine fellers as you and me should be at loggerheads. Howsomever, it can't be helped—and a reconcilement, or whatever they call it, is impossible. Your life or mine, Jack—that's the question to be decided now."

"Depend upon it, old fellow, that you'll be a croaker before morning," returned the Doctor, as he raised his glass to his lips.

"No—it's you that'll be a stiff'un, my boy," was the pleasant retort.

"Time must show. Remember that it's no infant you'll have to deal with."

"I should have beat you that night in the Haunted House, Jack, if the old o'man hadn't come to your assistance," observed Vitriol Bob, with a low but diabolical chuckle.

"Yes—but it was because I slipped over something, old fellow," was the answer; "and I shall take care to keep more steady on my pins next time."

"Depend upon it that when the death-struggle *does* come, Jack, the fust that slips will be the dead 'un. Did you ever hear of the Kentuckian fashion of dealing with an enemy?" demanded Vitriol Bob.

"Never," was the reply. "But I dare say it's something damnable—as bad, perhaps, as breaking a vitriol-bottle over a person's face—or else you wouldn't know anything about it."

"You're right there, Jack: it's *gruving* that I mean."

"And what's gouging, pray?"

"Tearing a fellow's oyo out of its socket," answered Vitriol Bob.

"One can play at that game as well as another,"

observed the Doctor, totally unmoved by the horrid nature of the conversation.

"To be sure: and we shall sooner or later see who beats at it."

Another pause succeeded this last remark of Vitriol Bob; and again did the two men sit contemplating each his enemy with a composure that was unnatural and dreadful to a degree under the circumstances.

Time wore on in this manner: their glasses were frequently replenished—and yet the liquor appeared not to produce the least effect upon them; but, cool, collected, and self-possessed, they sat measuring each other's form and calculating its strength, until darkness insensibly stole upon them. The waiter then entered to light the gas; and several frequenters of the house began to drop in to take their evening's allowance of alcoholic drink and stupefying tobacco.

At length Jack Rily rose, and, looking hard at his enemy, said, "I am going *now*."

"Very well," returned Vitriol Bob: "I'll keep you company."

There was nothing in these observations to excite either the curiosity or the suspicions of the other persons in the public-house-parlour: nevertheless, those words had a terrible significance for the two men who had exchanged them.

The Doctor walked leisurely out of the room first; and Vitriol Bob followed him. But the instant they were outside the premises, the former turned abruptly round upon his enemy, saying, "Come, let us proceed abreast: I don't mean to give you a chance of stabbing me from behind."

"Just as you like," observed Vitriol Bob; and he placed himself at the Doctor's right hand, leaving an interval of about a couple of feet between them.

In this manner they walked on in silence,—each occupied with his own peculiar reflections.

Vitriol Bob was intent only on vengeance,—dread, full, complete, and diabolical vengeance; and, though he seemed to be looking straight forward, he was nevertheless watching his companion with the sidelong glances of his reptile-like eyes.

Jack Rily was calculating in his mind what course he should adopt. He was naturally as brave as a lion: but he did not perceive any advantage in risking his life in a struggle that, even were he victorious, would produce neither profit nor glory. The only possible good that could result to him from a triumphant issue of the quarrel, would be the removal of a bitter, inveterate, and determined enemy. Nevertheless, the Doctor had most potent reasons to induce him to avoid this deadly encounter. He had just obtained a vast sum of money, and had the means of realising five times as much: the world, therefore, had suddenly assumed a smiling aspect in his eyes. He had already resolved to abandon his nefarious pursuits, which indeed were no longer necessary—and settle down quietly in the cottage for the purchase of which he had that day concluded a bargain;—and all these prospects were to be staked on the hazard of a die—risked fearfully at the bidding of the miscreant who was walking by his side!

At one moment the Doctor seriously thought of giving his companion into charge to the first corps of policemen whom they might encounter; for this was the hour when the little detachments of constables went about relieving their comrades on duty. But that idea was abandoned almost as soon

as formed: inasmuch as Jack Rily had all his money about him, and he knew that if he handed Vitriol Bob over to the police as the murderer of Torrens or of Mrs. Mortimer, the miscreant would unhesitatingly turn round with some charge that would at least place him (the Doctor) in temporary restraint, and lead to an examination of his person.

Jack Rily therefore came to the determination of pushing on into the heart of London, well knowing that Vitriol Bob's object was not to assail him in any neighbourhood where the contest was likely to be observed and prevented, but to drive him by dint of persecution, dogging, and a hateful companionship, into the open country, where through very desperation the Doctor should make up his mind to settle the matter decisively by a struggle on equal terms. Feeling convinced that this was his enemy's purpose, Jack Rily resolved either to weary him out or give him the slip if possible—or else to seize an opportunity of stabbing him suddenly in some place where an immediate escape was practicable.

We must again observe it was through no cowardice that the Doctor was desirous of avoiding a conflict from which only one could possibly depart alive: but he had so many inducements to cling to existence, that he saw no advantage in risking them all in a quarrel where the personal animosity was entirely on the other side.

In the course of half an hour they arrived in the vicinity of the Angel at Islington; and Jack Rily, now breaking the silence which had lasted since they quitted the public-house at Pentonville, said, "This walking makes one thirsty: let's have some beer."

"Willingly," answered Vitriol Bob: "and we'll drink out of the same pot to make people believe we're friends."

They accordingly entered a gin-shop and shared a pot of porter at the bar; after which they resumed their walk, passing down the City Road. They kept abreast, and preserved a deep silence,—each watching the movements of the other—the Doctor in the hope of being able to give his companion a sudden thrust with his knife—and Vitriol Bob for the purpose of preventing the escape of his enemy.

It was ten o'clock when they came within sight of the Bank of England; and as they passed under its solid wall, Jack Rily wondered whether he should be alive to keep an appointment which he had with Green for eleven next morning in order to have some more of his notes changed by that individual.

"All the money in that there place, old feller, won't save one or t'other of us from death before many hours is gone by," observed Vitriol Bob, in a low and ferocious tone.

"You must make the best use of your time, then," returned Jack; "since you've got a presentiment that it's so near."

"No—it's you that had better say your prayers," retorted the miscreant. "But what's the use of keeping both your hands in your pockets? If you think you'll be able to draw out your knife suddenly and give me a poke under the ribs, you're uncommonly mistaken."

"I wasn't dreaming of such a thing," answered Jack Rily, for the first time showing a slight degree of confusion in his manner.

"It's false, old feller," said Vitriol Bob: "you're

got the clasp-knife open in your pocket—I know you have. The gas-lights is strong enough about there to enable a sharp-sighted chap, like me, to twig all that goes on."

"It's you that speaks false," returned Jack Rily, still keeping his hands in his pockets.

And, again relapsing into silence, they pursued their way.

Passing in front of the Exchange, and up Cornhill, they turned into Birchin Lane. There Jack Rily hesitated for an instant which way to proceed: but suddenly recollecting that in a little passage to the left there was a public-house called the Bengal Arms, he said, "There's a crib here where they sell capital ale."

"Let's have some," cried Vitriol Bob. "You go on first—the place is too narrow for us both."

"No—you go first," said the Doctor.

"In this way, then," responded Vitriol Bob: and stepping nimbly in front of his companion, he turned round and walked backwards along the passage until it suddenly grew wider opposite the door of the Bengal Arms.

Jack Rily laughed at this manœuvre: but he was in reality disappointed—for had Vitriol Bob acted with less precaution, he would have assuredly received the whole length of the Doctor's formidable knife in his back, ere he had proceeded half way up the passage.

"We'll go into the parlour here," said Jack, "and have some bread and cheese. I'm hungry."

"So am I," observed Vitriol Bob, in a dry, laconic tone which denoted the terrible determination that inspired the man's mind,—a determination never to part from his companion until one of them should be no more!

There was something awful—something frightfully revolting and hideously appalling in the circumstance of those two miscreants thus wandering about together in a manner that appeared amicable enough to all who beheld them,—two wretches possessing the hearts of fiends and the external ugliness of monsters,—two incarnate demons capable of any turpitude, however black the dye!

CHAPTER CCIII.

THE BENGAL ARMS.—RENEWED WANDERINGS.

THE parlour at the Bengal Arms is—or at least was at the time whereof we are writing—a long, low, dingy room, very dark in the day-time and indifferently lighted in the evening. It is always filled with a motley assembly of guests; and also is the beverage most in request—while to one who indulges in a cigar, at least ten patronise the unaffected enjoyment of the clay-pipe.

On the present occasion the company was numerous: the tobacco-smoke hung like a dense mist in the place, the gas-burners showing dimly through the pestiferous haze;—and the heat was intense.

Jack Rily and Vitriol Bob contrived to find room at one of the tables; and a slipshod waiter supplied them in due time with a pot of ale and bread and cheese, to the discussion of which they addressed themselves in a manner affording not the slightest suspicion of the deadly enmity which existed between them.

While they were thus engaged they had an oppor-

tunity of listening to the conversation that was taking place amongst the other guests.

"Well, for my part," said a little, stout, podgy individual, with a bald head and a round, red, good-humoured countenance, "I have always been taught to look on the City institutions as the blesseddest things ever invented."

"And I maintain that they're the foulest abuses in the universe," exclaimed a tall, thin, sawn-faced individual, striking the table with his clenched fist as he spoke. "Why should everything east of Temple Bar be different from everything west?" he demanded, looking sternly round upon the company as if to defy any one to answer his questions. "Why should it be necessary to have barristers as magistrates in Westminster, and fat stupid old Aldermen in the City?—why should the ridiculous ostentation, useless trappings, and preposterous display of the Mayoralty be maintained for so miserably small a fraction of the great metropolis? Talk of your City Institutions, indeed!—they are either the most awful nonsense that ever made grown up persons look more absurd than little boys playing with paper cocked-hats and wooden swords—or else they are rottenness and corruption. When the Municipal Corporations were reformed in 1835, why was the City of London omitted? Did not Lord John Russell then pledge himself *most solemnly and sacredly* to bring in a separate bill for the London Corporation?—and has this promise, almost amounting to a vow, ever been fulfilled? No: and why? Because every Government, one after another, is afraid to lose the political support of this precious Corporation. And to these selfish considerations is sacrificed every principle of justice, propriety, and common sense. Look at the rascally extravagance and vile profusion which characterise the Corporation. The parish of St. Marylebone, with its hundred and forty thousand inhabitants, only expends *a hundred and twenty-eight thousand pounds* for those parochial purposes which cost the City, with a population of ten thousand less than the other, nearly *a million*! The difference is that Marylebone is governed by an intelligent vestry—whereas London is under a stupid Corporation! Look, again, at the iniquities perpetrated by the Aldermen in their capacity as licensing magistrates—the gross partiality that they show towards some publicans, and the inveterate hostility they manifest towards others. *The rights of the freemen* are a scandal and a shame—many able mechanics and other operatives being frequently driven from the City on account of their inability to pay the money for taking up their freedom.* Then again, look at the preposterous power which the Lord Mayor enjoys of stopping up all the thoroughfares and impeding business in every shape and way, on any occasion when it may suit him and his bloated, guzzling, purse-proud adherents to pass in their gingerbread coaches through the City? Is this consistent with British freedom?—is it compatible with the rights or interests of the citizens? Faugh!"

And the speaker resumed his pipe, in deep disgust at the abuses which he had thus succinctly, but most truly enumerated.

"Well, I don't know—but I like all our old in-

* This was the case with the celebrated Watt, the improver of the steam-engine. He was driven from the city of London, at the commencement of his career, through his inability to pay the fine, then amounting to 40*l*. This fact remains on record to the immortal disgrace of the Corporation.

stitutions," said the bald-headed man, with the stolid obstinacy and contemptible narrow-mindedness which so frequently characterise the John Bullism of a certain class. "The wisdom of our ancestors—"

"The wisdom of the devil!" ejaculated the tall, sallow-faced individual who had held forth on the City abuses. "That is a fool's reason for admiring established and inveterate corruption. The wisdom of our ancestors, indeed! Why—those ancestors believed in the divine right of Kings, and were sincere in praying on the 30th of January as if Charles the First was really a Martyr instead of a Traitor. Our ancestors, too, put faith in witches—aye, and burnt them also! It was our ancestors who kindled the fires in Smithfield where persons suffered at the stake; and our ancestors advocated the most blood-thirsty code of laws in Europe, in virtue of which men were strung up by dozens at a time at the Old Bailey. Our ancestors prosecuted writers for their political and religious opinions, and seemed to take a delight in everything that gratified the inhuman ambition of Kings and Queens, to the prejudice of real freedom. Our ancestors, in fact, were the most ignorant—besotted—bloody-minded miscreants that ever disgraced God's earth; and any man who turns an adoring glance upon the deeds of those ruffians, deserves to be hooted out of all decent society."

Having thus delivered his sentiments on the subject, the sallow-faced individual was about to resume his pipe, when, another idea occurring to him, he suddenly burst forth again in the following terms:—

"But who are those people that generalise so inanely when they speak of the wisdom of our ancestors? They are persons who inherit all the old, wretched, and worn-out prejudices of their forefathers, without having the intellect or the courage to think for themselves. They are the statesmen who gladly fall back upon any argument in order to defend the monstrous abuses of our institutions against the enlightening influence of reform. They are the churchmen who are deeply interested in preserving the loaves and fishes of which their ancestors in the hierarchy plundered the nation. They are, in fact, all those individuals who have anything to lose by wholesome innovation, and everything to gain by the maintenance of a system so thoroughly rotten, corrupt, and loathsome that it infects and demoralizes every grade of society. The Peer eulogises the wisdom of his ancestors, because they handed down to him usurped privileges and an hereditary rank the principle of which is a crying shame. The Member of the House of Commons speaks of the wisdom of his ancestors, because he holds his seat through the frightful corruption introduced by them into the electoral system. The placeman talks of the wisdom of his ancestors, because they invented sinecures and distributed with the lavish hand of robbers the gold which they wrung from the marrow and the sinew of the industrious millions. The parson praises the wisdom of his ancestors, because they invented the atrocious system of allowing a rector to enjoy five thousand a-year for doing nothing, and paying his curate ninety pounds a-year for doing everything. The lawyer praises the wisdom of his ancestors, because they devised such myriads of insane, stupid, unjust, rascally, and contradictory enactments, that a man cannot move hand or foot even in the most tri-

vial and common sense affairs, without the intervention of an attorney: and wherever that common sense does exist on one side, law is almost sure to be on the other; in the same way that wherever justice is, there law is not. For my part, I do firmly believe that there is not a more wretched and oppressed country in all the world than England—nor a more duped, deceived, gulled, and humbugged people on the face of the earth than the English. Talk of freedom, indeed: why, almost every institution you have is in favour of the rich and against the poor!"

"I can't say that I see it," observed the bald-pated man, in the usually dogmatic tone of confirmed obstinacy and unmitigated ignorance.

"Then you must be blind!" ejaculated the other, his emphasis indicating sovereign contempt for the individual whom he addressed. "Look at the Game Laws: are they made for the rich or for the poor? Are not thousands of miserable creatures thrown into gaols for daring to kill a hare or a pheasant, because, forsooth! it interferes with the sport of the squire? Do not the rich ride when out hunting through the corn-fields of their tenants?—and what redress can the latter obtain? Then, again, look at the state of the law generally. What chance has a poor man of bringing a wealthy oppressor to justice?—who can go to Westminster Hall without a pocket full of gold? Why, the very Railway Companies make it a boast that by means of capital they can ruin—aye, and break the heart of any poor antagonist in a law-court, let his cause be ever so just! Look, too, at the privileges enjoyed by the landowners: what proportion of the taxes do they bear in comparison with the industrious, toiling, starving peasantry or mechanics on those estates? Look at the condition of our taxation: are not all the necessities of life subjected to frightful imposts, while the luxuries are comparatively cheap to the favoured few who can obtain them? What is the proportion between the duty on a poor man's horse and cart and a rich man's carriage and four?—what the proportion between the poor man's beer and spirits and the rich man's foreign wines? Again, if a scion of the aristocracy wants money, he is provided with a good place if not an absolute sinecure; whereas the poor man is sent to die a lingering and degraded death in that awful gaol denominated a work-house. Look at the combination of capital against labour. If capitalists and monopolists lower wages, there is no redress save by means of a strike on the part of the workmen; and a strike is looked upon as something akin to rebellion against the Sovereign. In every way is the law in favour of the rich—in every way is it grinding and oppressive to the poor."

A profound silence followed these observations: for every one present, save the bald-pated man, perceived their truth and recognized their justice;—and even he had not impudence enough to venture a denial which he could not sustain by argument.

"What we require, then," resumed the sallow-faced individual, at length breaking the long pause, "is an entire reform,—a radical reform, and not a measure bearing the name without any of the reality. I love my country and my countrymen as well as any British subject: but it makes my heart bleed to witness the misery which exists throughout the sphere of our industrious population;—and it makes my blood boil to think



that nothing is done to remedy the crying evils and reform the tremendous abuses which I have this night enumerated."

The discourse was now taken up by several other individuals present, the bald-headed gentleman declining to pursue it farther; and the sallow-faced guest fearlessly and ably dissected the whole social and governmental system, concluding with an emphatic declaration that the community should agitate morally, but unweariedly, for those reforms which were so much needed.

It was twelve o'clock when Jack Rily and Vitriol Bob issued from the Bengal Arms; and passing through George Yard, they entered Lombard Street.

Thence they proceeded towards London Bridge, over which they walked in a leisurely manner—side by side—watching each other—and maintaining a profound silence.

Down the Blackfriars' Road they went; and on reaching the obelisk in St. George's Fields, the Doctor paused for a few minutes to make up his mind what course to pursue.

He was already wearied—and a mental irritation

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was growing upon him in spite of his characteristic recklessness and indifference: he required rest—and he knew that he could obtain none so long as his terrible enemy was by his side.

"Perhaps I may weary him out," thought the Doctor to himself: "or if I lead him into the open country I shall perhaps be able to give him the slip. Otherwise we must fight it out in some place where no interruption need be dreaded."

Influenced by these ideas, Jack Rily resumed his wanderings, Vitriol Bob still remaining by his side like the ghost of some murdered victim.

They proceeded towards the Elephant and Castle; and on reaching that celebrated tavern, they once more refreshed themselves with beer, as the establishment was still open in consequence of some parochial entertainment that was given there on that particular evening.

On issuing from the house, the two men proceeded along the Kent Road.

Nearly an hour had now elapsed since they had last exchanged a word; for the feeling of desperate irritation was growing stronger and stronger on

the part of Jack Rily—while Vitriol Bob was becoming impatient of this delay in the gratification of his implacable vengeance.

But delight filled the soul of the latter when he found that his companion was taking a direction that led into the open country; and, breaking the long silence which had prevailed, he said tauntingly, "You are getting tired, Jack."

"Not a bit," replied the Doctor, assuming a cheerful tone.

"Oh! yes—you are, old feller," exclaimed Vitriol Bob: "you drag your feet along as if you was."

"I could walk all night without being wearied so much as you are now," returned the Doctor: and, thus speaking, he mended his pace.

"I never felt less tired than I am at present, Jack," said Vitriol Bob: "but you are failing in spite of this pretended briskness. You can't keep it up."

"You shall see," answered the Doctor, his irritation augmenting fearfully.

Vitriol Bob made no further observation upon the subject; and the two miscreants walked on, side by side, until they reached the Green Man at Blackheath.

There was no tavern—no beer-shop open; and both were thirsty, alike with fatigue and the workings of evil passions.

Seating himself upon a bench fixed against the wall of a public-house, Jack Rily could not help gnashing his teeth with rage; and as he maintained his looks fixed upon the countenance of his enemy, his eyes glared with a savage and ferocious malignity. The moon-light enabled Vitriol Bob to catch the full significance of that expression which distorted the Doctor's features; and, sitting down close by his side, he said, "You are prowling desperate now, Jack: I knowed I should disturb your coolness and composure before long."

"By God! you're right, my man!" ejaculated the Doctor, unable to restrain his irritation. "I had no enmity against you at first—I would have shaken hands with you and been as good friends as ever—eye, and have given you more money than you've ever yet seen in all your life,—given it to you as a present! But now I hate and detest you—I loathe and abhor you! Damnation! I could stick my knife into you this very minute!"

"Two can play at that game," returned Vitriol Bob, savagely. "But remember that we're talking tolerably loud just underneath the windows of this 'ere public; and I don't feel at all inclined to be baulked of the satisfaction —"

"Of a last and desperate struggle, eh?" exclaimed the Doctor, starting up. "Well—we will not delay it much longer. Come along:—it is pretty near time that this child's play was put an end to—I am getting sick of it."

"Bless ye, I've no such excitement," said Vitriol Bob, rising from the bench and again placing himself by the side of his companion: "I rayther like it than anythink else. We've had a nice walk—plenty of refreshments—and now and then a cozy little bit of chat—besides the advantage of hearing them political sermons in at the Bengal Arms: and so I don't think you can say we've spent the time very disagreeably."

All this was said to irritate the Doctor still more: for Vitriol Bob, well acquainted with the disposition of his enemy, knew that when once he was thus excited it was impossible for him to regain his composure.

Jack Rily made no answer—but continued his way in silence, weariness gaining upon his body as rapidly as bitter ferocity was acquiring a more potent influence over his mind.

CHAPTER CCIV

THE CATASTROPHE.

IT was two o'clock in the morning when the Doctor and Vitriol Bob ascended Shooter's Hill.

Both were much fatigued—but the former far more so than the latter.

The moon rode high in the heavens, which were spangled with thousands of stars; and every feature of the scene was brought out into strong relief by the pure silvery light that filled the air.

The countenance of Jack Rily was ghastly pale and hideous to gaze upon—his large teeth gleaming through the opening in his upper lip, and his eyes glaring like those of a wild beast about to spring upon its prey;—whereas the features of Vitriol Bob denoted a stern—dogged—ferocious determination.

Having reached the top of the hill, the two men paused as if by mutual though tacit consent; and glancing rapidly along the road in each direction, they neither saw nor heard anything that threatened to interfere with the deadly purpose on which they were now both intent.

No sound of vehicles met their ears—no human forms dotted the long highway which, with its white dust, had the appearance of a river traversing the dark plains.

"Well—are you pretty nearly tired out, Jack?" demanded Vitriol Bob.

"I am as fresh as ever," answered the Doctor.

"But you're afraid, old feller," exclaimed the other.

"Not afraid of you?" retorted Jack Rily, contemptuously.

"You would have run away if you could," said his enemy.

"You are a liar, Bob," was the savage response.

"No—it's you that tells the lie, Jack. I've watched you narrowly—and I could see all that was a-passing in your mind as plain as if it was a book."

"But you can't read a book, Bob, when you have it open before you."

"There you're wrong, Doctor: I've had my meditation as well as you."

"And a pretty use you've made of it! But I don't see any use in our standing palavering here: I want to get back to London—and so the sooner you let me polish you off, the better."

"I'm as anxious to come to the scratch as you. Where shall it be?"

"In the field close by, Bob. We may be interrupted in the road."

"And yet there's nothink and no one to be seen."

"Never mind. We'll make as sure as possible," observed the Doctor, who throughout this rapid and laconic colloquy had endeavoured to appear as collected and as composed as possible: but his words had hissed through his teeth—for his mouth was as parched as if he had been swallowing the dry dust of the road.

"Let's over the hedge, then," said Vitriol Bob.

The two men accordingly made their way into the adjoining field; and having proceeded to a short distance down the sloping meadow, they suddenly stopped short and confronted each other.

"Shall it be here?" demanded Vitriol Bob.

"Yes," responded Jack Rily; and drawing his clasp-knife, which was already open, from his pocket, he sprang with a savage howl upon his enemy.

But Vitriol Bob was also prepared with his sharp weapon; and catching the Doctor's right arm with his left hand, he inflicted a wound upon the shoulder upon his foe. Then the two men closed completely upon each other—and the death-struggle commenced!

It was an appalling spectacle,—the knives flashing in the pure moon-light—and the eyes of the miscreants glaring savagely, while they writhed in each other's embrace, savage howls bursting from them at short intervals.

In less than a minute they were covered with blood: but the nature of the contest only permitted them to inflict hideous gashes and not decisive wounds upon each other. But suddenly Jack Rily's foot slipped, and he fell backward—bringing however his adversary down upon him: for the left hand of each held a firm grasp upon the collar of the other.

As they thus tumbled, Vitriol Bob endeavoured to plant his knife in the breast of his antagonist—but the spring of the weapon broke, and the blade suddenly closing as it glanced over the Doctor's shoulder, cut through its owner's fingers to the very bone. A yell of mingled rage and pain escaped him; but the chances were at the same moment equalised by the fact of Rily's clasp-knife escaping from his hand.

The death-struggle was now continued by mere brute force; and the Doctor succeeded in getting uppermost. At the same time he seized upon Vitriol Bob's nose with his large sharp teeth and bit it completely off—in spite of the almost superhuman efforts of the other to resist this savage attack.

Yelling horribly with the pain, and with his countenance bathed in blood, Vitriol Bob once more got his foe beneath him; and the Doctor echoed those appalling cries of agony as he felt the forefinger of his adversary's left hand thrust into one of his eyes. Frightful—terrific—revolting was the contest at this crisis,—the two miscreants writhing, struggling, convulsing like snakes in each other's grasp,—and the ferocious process of gouging inflicting the agonies of hell upon the maddened Jack Rily.

'Twas done: the eye was literally torn out of its socket; but the pain excited the Doctor to the most tremendous efforts in order to wreak a deadly vengeance upon his foe. And as they rolled over on the blood-stained sward, Rily's hand came in contact with the knife which he had ere now lost; and clutching it with a savage yell of triumph, he plunged it into Vitriol Bob's throat.

The miscreant, mortally wounded, rolled over on the grass with a gurgling sound coming from between his lips; and Jack Rily was immediately upon him, brandishing the fatal weapon.

Then, at that moment, as the moon-light fell fully upon the countenance of Vitriol Bob, as he gazed up at his victorious enemy, what fiendish hate—what impotent rage—what diabolical malignity were depicted upon those distorted features and expressed in every lineament of that blood-smear'd face,—a face rendered the more frightful by the loss of the nose.

"Who will return to London this morning, Bob?" demanded Jack Rily, scarcely able to articulate, so parched was his throat—so agonising was the pain in the socket whence the eye had been torn out. "Ah! you can't answer—but you know well enough what the reply should be!"

Vitriol Bob made a sudden and desperate effort to throw his enemy off him: but he was easily overpowered—and in another moment the Doctor drove the sharp blade of the knife through the man's right eye, deep into the brain.

So strong was the convulsive spasm which shot through the form of Vitriol Bob, that the Doctor was hurled completely off him: but all danger of a renewal of the contest was past—Jack Rily's enemy was no more!

The conqueror lay for some minutes upon the sward, so exhausted that it almost seemed possible to give up the ghost at a gasp: it appeared, in fact, as if he retained a spark of life within himself by his own free will—but that were he to breathe even too hard, existence would become extinct that moment.

A sensation of numbness came over him, deadening the pain which his eyeless socket occasioned him; and for nearly ten minutes a sort of dreamy repose stole upon the man, the incidents of the night becoming confused and all his ideas jumbling together pell-mell.

But suddenly—swift as the lightning darts forth from the thunder-cloud upon the obscurity of a stormy sky—a feeling of all that had happened and where he was sprang up in the Doctor's soul; and half rising from his recumbent posture, he gazed wildly around with the visual organ that was still left.

The motionless corpse of his slaughtered enemy lay near;—and the moon-light rendered the ghastly countenance fearfully visible.

The pain in the socket now returned with renewed force; and the Doctor, raising himself up with difficulty, began to drag his heavy limbs slowly away from the scene of a horrible contest and a dreadful death.

He was wounded in many places; and the anguish which he now again endured through the loss of his eye, was maddening him.

At the bottom of the field there was a pond; and Jack Rily, on reaching the bank of the stagnant pool, felt that he could at that moment give all the money he possessed for a single glass of pure water. A draught from that pond would be delicious: but how was he to obtain it? He might stoop down, and endeavour to raise it with his hand—or he might even fill his hat: but the bank was steep all round—and the wretched man was so exhausted and enfeebled that he knew he should fall in and most likely be suffocated.

Seating himself upon the bank, he maintained his one eye fixed upon the pond in which the moon-beams were reflected; and at the expiration of a few minutes he resolved to make an attempt to assuage his burning thirst, even though the consequences should be fatal.

Stooping cautiously down, he succeeded in filling his hat; but as he was drawing it up, he overbalanced himself, and fell headlong into the water.

The pond was deep: but Jack Rily managed to drag himself out;—and on gaining the bank he fainted.

How long he remained in a senseless state, he

knew not: or whether a deep sleep had succeeded the fit, he was likewise unable to conjecture. Certain it was, however, that on awaking slowly from what appeared to have been a profound trance, a stronger light than that which he had last seen fell upon his view—for the sun had just risen.

Then all the horrors of the past night came back to the wretch's memory; and, though the pain in his eyeless socket was much mitigated, it was still poignant enough to wring bitter imprecations from his lips.

He endeavoured to rise: but he was as stiff all over as if he had been beaten soundly with a thick stick wielded by a strong hand—and he was also weakened by loss of blood and the fatigues which he had undergone.

He longed to get back to London, not only in order to have surgical assistance to assuage the pain consequent on the frightful injury he had sustained by the loss of his eye; but also because he was fearful that the body of his murdered enemy would be shortly discovered and his own arrest follow as a matter of course.

Therefore, although he would have given worlds to be enabled to lie on the grass for hours longer, he raised himself up, and moved slowly away across the fields.

But how could he enter London in the broad day-light—covered with blood and maimed as he was? One course only appeared open to him: namely, to remain concealed somewhere until night, and then return to his lodgings. Accordingly, he lay down under a hedge at the distance of about a mile from the scene of the previous night's deadly contest; and again did he sink into a deep trance.

From this he was awakened by the sounds of voices; and starting up, he heard people talking on the other side of the hedge. They were labourers—and having discovered the corpse of Vitriol Bob in the field adjoining Shooter's Hill, they were hurrying back to the farm to which they belonged, in order to give an alarm. Their pace was rapid—their remarks denoted indescribable horror—and Jack Rily remained a breathless listener until they were out of sight and hearing.

He then rose and moved off across the fields as quickly as he could drag himself along.

The sun was now high in the heavens; and he thereby knew that it was nearly mid-day. Not a breath of wind stirred the air; and the heat was stifling.

He had bandaged his head in such a way with his handkerchief as to conceal the frightful injury which he had received by the loss of his eye: but the pain he experienced was excruciating.

In a short time he reached a rivulet, where he washed himself; and he was likewise enabled to slake his thirst. A turnip plucked from a field afforded him a sorry meal;—and thus was a man having thousands of pounds secured about his person, reduced to the most miserable shifts and compelled to wander about in the most deplorable condition that it is possible to conceive.

Never had the time appeared to pass with such leaden wings;—and, oh! how the man longed for night to fall. Not more ardently did Wellington at Waterloo crave for the coming of the obscurity of evening, when, beaten and hopeless, he was in full retreat ere the Prussians made their appearance to change the fortune of the day and win the victory

which England so arrogantly claims,—not more earnestly did the Iron Duke desire the presence of the darkness on that occasion, than Jack Rily in the present instance.

At last the sun was sinking in the western horizon; and the Doctor bent his steps towards the metropolis which lay at a distance of about seven miles.

It was nine o'clock in the evening, when Jack Rily entered the southern suburbs; and he succeeded in gaining his lodgings in Roupel Street without attracting any particular observation. A surgeon with whom he was acquainted, and who did not ask any questions so long as he was well paid, dressed his wounds; and the Doctor began to think the victory over his mortal enemy cheaply bought by the loss of an eye. The black patch which he was compelled to wear, certainly increased the hideousness of his countenance: but as vanity was not one of his failings, this circumstance did not so much trouble him as the inconvenience and the pain attendant upon the loss of the optic.

In the course of the ensuing day, the report spread all over London that the body of a man, frightfully mutilated, had been discovered in a field near Shooter's Hill; and that it had been removed to a public-house at Blackheath, in order to lie there for recognition. A minute description of the clothing which the corpse had on, was given in the newspapers and also in placards posted in the principal thoroughfares of the metropolis; and it was likewise stated that the clasp-knife, with which the mortal blow was struck, had been left by the murderer sticking in the victim's head.

Now it happened that Mary Calvert—*alias* Pig-faced Moll—and whom the reader will recollect to have been already represented as Vitriol Bob's paramour, was alarmed by the protracted absence of her fancy-man; and while wandering about in search of him at his usual haunts, she observed one of the placards.

The attire therein specified exactly corresponded with the dress which Vitriol Bob wore when he quitted her two days previously; and she at once went to the public-house where the body was lying. A glance was sufficient to convince her that her suspicions were well founded; and on examining the clasp-knife, she instantly recognised it as one which she had frequently seen in the possession of Jack Rily.

Everything was now clearly apparent to Molly Calvert. She knew the deadly animosity that Vitriol Bob had nourished against the Doctor: she was likewise acquainted with the intention of her paramour to wreak his vengeance upon that individual on the first suitable occasion;—and she therefore concluded that a deadly conflict had taken place between them, ending in the murder of her fancy-man.

From the public-house where the body lay, she proceeded straight to a police-station, where she gave such information as led to an immediate search after the Doctor. In the course of the next day a member of the Detectives ascertained that Jack Rily had recently been living in Roupel Street, and that he had only quitted his lodgings there the preceding evening. For the Doctor, alarmed by the publicity given to the discovery of Vitriol Bob's body, had deemed it prudent to flit.

Several days elapsed without affording the police any clue to his whereabouts: but at the expiration

of a week Molly Calvert herself one evening traced him to an obscure pot-house in one of the vilest parts of Bethnal Green; and he was immediately arrested.

Upon his person was found a vast sum in gold and bank-notes—but chiefly consisting of the latter; and this amount was accordingly seized by the officers. Jack Rily was then locked up for the night, and on the following morning he was taken before a magistrate.

When charged with the murder of Vitriol Bob, he at once admitted that he had been the cause of that individual's death, but declared that it was in self-defence. His story was corroborated by many circumstances, amongst which the loss of his eye was not the least; for the organ had been found, as it was torn out of its socket, close by the corpse. The gashes which the man had received—Vitriol Bob's own clasp-knife, discovered on the fatal spot—and the evident marks of a fearful struggle having taken place,—all proved that the deed was neither cold-blooded nor accomplished by surprise. On the other hand, might not Jack Rily have himself provoked the contest which terminated so fatally to his opponent? This point the magistrate left to a jury to decide; and the Doctor was ordered to be committed for trial. Relative to the money found upon his person, he persisted in declaring that it was his own, and that he had come by it honestly,—but from what source he refused to state.

CHAPTER CCV

THE CASTELCICALAN REPUBLIC.

CASTELCICALA became a Republic; and Richard Markham had the immortal honour of founding a purely democratic government in the finest State belonging to the Italian Peninsula.

The Chamber of Senators voted by an immense majority the very measure which deprived them of their rank of Peers, and abolished titles of nobility altogether. This species of suicidal process, adopted in obedience to the popular will, the interests of the community at large, and the dictates of a consummate civilisation, presented a glorious spectacle to the eyes of all the world. And these good men who thus sacrificed their own family interests to those of their country, experienced a rich reward in the enthusiasm with which they were received by the people when the result of the division on the third reading of the Bill was made known. For no empty honours could outvie that applause which grateful myriads thus poured forth; and if Dukes, Marquises, Counts, Viscounts, and Barons went home that day denuded of those titles, they had the proud recompense of a conviction that their names would shine all the more resplendently in history through their own unartificial light. Their's was now the aristocracy of VIRTUE and INTELLIGENCE!

The Chamber of Peers was abolished; but all those who had voted in favour of the Government measures were returned by a grateful people as members of the National Assembly which was now convoked—the new system admitting of only one House of Parliament. The moment that august body met, one of its earliest duties was to frame the new Constitution; and this was done on the broadest and most liberal principles. It was resolved, amongst other matters thus definitively

settled, that the President of the Republic should be elected on the principle of universal suffrage, and for three years; and we need scarcely inform our readers that there was not even any opposition attempted against General Markham.

But in the meantime—for these proceedings occupied upwards of two months—the other Italian States had become seriously alarmed at the establishment of Democracy in Castalcicala; and the diplomatic agents of Naples, Rome, Tuscany, and Sardinia were ordered by their respective Governments to demand their passports. These were instantaneously granted; and shortly after the departure of the envoys, a league was formed by the Sovereigns of the States which we have named for the purpose of compelling Castalcicala to return into the sisterhood of monarchical countries. Protocols first poured into the Foreign Office at Montoni; and these were logically answered by the Minister presiding over that department. Menaces followed;—and these were treated with a firmness proving how confidently General Markham and his Cabinet relied upon the Castalcicalans to defend the institutions which they had consecrated. An ultimatum, threatening immediate hostilities, was now signed by that blood-thirsty miscreant the King of Naples—by the weak, timid, and vacillating Pope Pius IX.—by the Grand Duke of Tuscany—and by Charles Albert, King of Sardinia. To this document Richard Markham replied, through the Minister of Foreign Affairs, insisting upon the right of the Castalcicalans, as a free people, to choose their own form of Government; and the argument was so well sustained by a mass of reasoning, that the King of Sardinia and the Grand-Duke of Tuscany withdrew from the league, re-accrediting their diplomatic agents to the Castalcicalan Republic. The timid Pope was frightened by a knowledge of Markham's military prowess into a similar course; and the tyrant Ferdinand of Naples was left alone in hostility against the newly-established Democracy.

This monarch—obstinate, self-willed, and blood-thirsty, like all the Bourbons—was not disheartened by what he called the “defection” of the Pontiff, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, and the King of Piedmont; but he immediately declared war against the Castalcicalan Republic. Thereupon General Markham commenced the most active preparations, not only to prevent an invasion, but to carry hostilities into the enemy's country. In a short time an army of twenty-six thousand men was collected in the south of the State; and Richard, having taken leave of his family, proceeded to join it, attended by a numerous staff, of which Charles Hatfield was a member. The executive power was in the meantime delegated to Signor Bassano, the General's brother-in-law; and the utmost enthusiasm pervaded the entire Castalcicalan population, so great was the confidence entertained in the valour of the army and the skill of its commander.

It was in the first week of December, 1846, that the Castalcicalan forces commenced their march towards the Neapolitan frontier. Intelligence had already arrived to the effect that the Neapolitans, to the number of forty thousand men, were advancing under the command of General Avellino; but Markham, well knowing that the spirit of a republican army was far greater than that which animates troops belonging to a monarchy, was not daunted by this immense numerical superiority on the part of the enemy. He was deeply impressed

with the opinion that Napoleon Bonaparte had damped the ardour of his soldiers by exchanging the consular cap for the imperial crown: his knowledge of French history told him that Bonaparte's grandest victories were gained with a republican army;—and he was likewise well aware that the Neapolitan troops loathed and abhorred the monarch who had sent them out to fight against liberal institutions. He therefore resolved to push on and meet the enemy; for his generous nature contemplated with horror the prospect of an invasion of the fertile plains of Castelcicala by an army which even in its own country acted the lawless and ferocious part of a horde of plunderers and ravagers.

On the 7th of December, General Markham entered the Neapolitan territory at the head of his troops; and on the same evening he encamped beneath the walls of Casino, which surrendered without the least attempt at resistance. Here he waited four days in the hope that the Neapolitans would advance to the attack: but hearing that they had halted to rest awhile at Sabino—a place about sixty miles distant—he determined to continue his march. Accordingly, in the afternoon of the 13th, he came within sight of General Avellino's army, which he found to be occupying a strong position at a short distance from Sabino.

General Markham ascended an elevated flat to reconnoitre the precise distribution of the Neapolitans, and he was speedily convinced that an immense advantage might be gained by placing the artillery upon that height. The task was a difficult one to accomplish: but nothing was impossible to an active commander and enthusiastic troops;—and thus in a few hours, hollows were filled up, projections levelled, and a pathway cleared for the ascent of the cannon. Meantime General Avellino had made no movement on his side; and ere sunset the work of establishing the artillery on the eminence was complete.

The inactivity of the enemy during the entire afternoon led Markham to believe that Avellino meditated an attack in the course of the night; and the Castelcicalans were therefore fully prepared to give the Neapolitans a warm reception. But hour after hour passed without any indication of the approach of the enemy; and General Markham resolved to take the initiative at day-break.

Scarcely had the sun risen on the morning of the 14th of December, when the action commenced by a smart fire on the part of the Castelcicalan light troops, commanded by an active and gallant officer in whom the General had full confidence. The Neapolitans were thereby dislodged from an apparently inaccessible position near Sabino; and the result was that the Castelcicalans were enabled to stretch out upon the plains so as to threaten the enemy's flanks. Both armies were soon within cannon shot; and by nine o'clock in the forenoon the action became general.

The manœuvres on the Castelcicalan side were performed with a marvellous precision, fully compensating for the numerical inferiority of Markham's troops; and by mid-day they had succeeded in gaining possession of a wood which covered one of the enemy's corps. At the same time the cannon upon the height were scattering death throughout the Neapolitan ranks; and General Avellino ordered up his reserve of cavalry to take a share in the conflict. Markham was well prepared for this proceeding; and at the head of his cuirassiers he dashed

against the new-comers. This charge was made with an impetuosity altogether irresistible; and the Neapolitans were thrown into disorder in that part of the field. The Castelcicalans pursued their advantage; and by four o'clock in the afternoon the enemy were completely overwhelmed.

The Neapolitan loss was immense: upwards of twelve thousand men of that army lay dead upon the field—while an equal number had been made prisoners. On Markham's side the number of killed did not exceed two thousand; but the generous-hearted young man considered his splendid victory to be dearly bought even by means of that sacrifice—and the eyes which flashed with the fires of heroism on the battle-field, now melted into tears at the evidences of the sanguinary fight.

We should observe that the conduct of Charles Hatfield was admirable throughout this memorable day. In the charge upon the Neapolitan cavalry, he comported himself in a manner that more than once gained for him the approval of his commander; and when the strife was over and the victory was won, Markham complimented him on his prowess in the presence of the officers gathered about him at the time.

The booty acquired by this great battle was immense; for the Neapolitans who survived the conflict were compelled to retreat with such precipitation as to leave all their baggage and artillery in the hands of their enemy.

On the following day Markham set his army in motion towards the capital, at the gates of which he was determined to force the King to acknowledge the Castelcicalan Republic. But in his progress through the Neapolitan dominions, he adopted the most rigorous measures to protect the innocent inhabitants from plunder or wrong at the hands of his victorious troops; and he issued a proclamation to the effect that any soldier found guilty of an act of oppression or outrage, should be expelled the army and deprived of his civil rights as a Castelcicalan citizen.

It was at about mid-day on the 17th of December that Markham came within sight of Naples; and he was then met by plenipotentiaries sent by King Ferdinand to treat for an armistice, preparatory to negotiations for peace. The victorious General received the deputies with the utmost courtesy; he however bade them observe that it was not for him to *treat*—but to *dictate*. Thereupon he drew up the conditions on which he would spare the capital and retire from the kingdom,—those terms being the acknowledgment of the Castelcicalan Republic, the payment of all the expenses incurred by Castelcicala in consequence of this war, and a guarantee against the renewal of hostilities on the same pretence.

To these conditions Ferdinand refused to accede; and the citizens of Naples were called upon to arm in defence of the capital. But the people rose up as one man within the walls of the city, and threatened to dethrone the King unless he accepted the terms set forth by General Markham. The blood-thirsty Ferdinand was accordingly compelled to submit to the demands of the Castelcicalan General; and the conditions being fulfilled in the course of a few days, Markham began to retrace his way to the State which he had thus a second time saved from destruction.

It would be impossible to describe the enthusiasm with which the victorious General and his

army were received on their return to Castelvicala. The roads were lined with a grateful population, anxious to catch a glimpse of the hero and to testify their joy at the conquest which he had achieved over the enemy. Triumphal arches were raised—flags were waving in all directions—towns were illuminated—municipal corporations appeared with congratulatory addresses—and the peasantry made bonfires on the hills as proofs of their delight.

When the army approached Montoni, the General's family came out to meet him: and Isabella experienced more sincere pride in embracing a husband whose citizen name it was an honour to bear, than if he still wore a princely title and held a sovereign rank.

Peace was thus ensured to Castelvicala; and the Republic was firmly established, not only by the will of the people, but likewise by the prowess of the army.

Charles Hatfield, who, as one of the General's aides-de-camp, already held the rank of lieutenant, was now invested with a captaincy; and one of the members of the National Assembly happening to die at the time, the constituency thus left temporarily unrepresented, offered to elect him as their deputy. But he felt anxious to return to England; for letters reached him about this period, informing him that Mr. Hatfield's health had latterly caused serious apprehensions to his relatives and friends;—and the young man accordingly demanded leave of absence for a period. This was granted without hesitation; and Charles Hatfield took his departure, laden with presents from Markham and his family, and attended with their sincerest wishes for his prosperity.

CHAPTER CCVI.

CHARLES HATFIELD IN LONDON AGAIN.

THE information which Charles Hatfield had received respecting his father's health, was too true. Indeed, the accounts were purposely mitigated in order to alarm him as little as possible; and on his arrival at Lord Ellingham's mansion in Pall Mall, he found Mr. Hatfield confined to his bed.

Charles was greatly shocked at this circumstance: for he could not help fancying that his conduct had contributed mainly to undermine his father's health; but Mr. Hatfield reassured him on that head by declaring that a severe cold was the commencement of his illness.

"Were I thrown upon this bed of sickness by any fault of yours, Charles," he said, pressing his son's hand affectionately in both his own, "your behaviour during your short sojourn in Italy would speedily raise me from it. Not only have the newspapers mentioned your name in a manner highly creditable to you: but General Markham has sent us accounts of the most satisfactory nature concerning you."

These words were gratifying indeed to the young man.

"I can assure you, my revered parent," he said, "that I am indeed fully and completely changed. The image of that vile woman whom we will not name, is loathsome and abhorrent to me—and I would as readily come in contact with a serpent, as meet her again. Respecting that insane ambition which animated me at the same time I formed that disastrous attachment,—an ambition which

prompted me to aspire to a noble title,—it has all vanished as if it had never been. I have contemplated Republican institutions—I have seen a mighty Prince and all his family lay aside, their high rank without regret and abandon their titles with cheerfulness and at their own free will,—I have likewise beheld the magnates of the land following the same example, so that the equality of citizenship may be fully established;—and I am now astonished that I could ever have aspired to mere titular distinction. My eyes have been opened to the fact that men may be great and rise to fame, without those adventitious aids which savour of feudal barbarism;—and I am prouder of that rank of *Captain* which the battle of Sabino gave me in the army of Republican Castelvicala, than I could possibly be were the coronet of Ellingham placed upon my brow. Oh! how happy should I feel, could we all proceed to Castelvicala and settle for life in that beautiful city of Montoni which I love so well: yes—all of us to fix our habitation there," continued Charles, with the enthusiasm that was characteristic of his nature,—“you—my dear mother, who received me so kindly—the excellent Earl and his amiable Countess—myself—”

"And what is to become of poor Lady Frances?" asked Mr. Hatfield, with a smile in spite of his severe indisposition. "Wherefore is she not included in your list? Do you think that the Earl and the Countess would leave their amiable and lovely daughter behind them?"

Charles Hatfield blushed deeply as his father thus addressed him.

"Well, my dear boy—you make no reply," resumed Mr. Hatfield, with the smile—and a smile of ineffable satisfaction it was—still playing upon his pale countenance: "has Lady Frances offended you? Did she not receive you on your arrival ere now with as much kindness as the rest?"

"Oh! yes—yes," exclaimed Charles; "and she appeared to me more exquisitely beautiful than ever! Fool that I was—insensate dolt—idiot—madman, ever to place myself in a position which—"

"Do not excite yourself thus, my dear boy," interrupted Mr. Hatfield. "You admire Lady Frances?" he observed, after a short pause, and now attentively watching his son's countenance.

"My God! do not ask me that question, my dear father!" ejaculated Charles, with an expression of deep anguish on his features. "I love my beautiful cousin—I love her—and she cannot be mine! Oh! since I have been absent I have pondered on her image—I have cherished it as if it were that of a guardian angel! I have compared the amiability and excellence of Frances with the character of *that woman*—and you may judge how resplendently the charming girl shines by means of such a contrast!"

"And you may hope—yes, you may hope, Charles," said Mr. Hatfield, raising himself partially up in the bed. "Happiness yet awaits you."

"Happiness—hope—my dear father!" ejaculated Charles; "you speak in enigmas—you —"

"Nay—I speak only what I mean; and all I say is intelligible," interrupted Mr. Hatfield. "I tell you that you may hope for happiness—that Lady Frances may yet become your wife!"

"Is it possible?" cried the young man, clasping his hands in the wildness of his joy. "But how?"

Is that woman dead?" he demanded, speaking with strange rapidity of utterance.

"No—she is not dead," responded his father: "but she has married again!"

"Married!" ejaculated Charles. "And yet I do not see how that circumstance will alter my position," he added, in a desponding tone.

"Listen attentively—and do not excite yourself at one moment, and in the next give way to despair," said Mr. Hatfield.

Charles seated himself at his father's bed-side, and prepared to hear with attention the words that were about to be addressed to him.

"Some time ago—when it was first resolved that you should proceed to Italy for a short time," said Mr. Hatfield, "the Earl of Ellingham communicated to me the generous views which he entertained with regard to you. He observed that, as you had already discarded the woman who had ensnared you, and as she had agreed never more to molest you, you were morally severed in respect to the matrimonial bond. He moreover declared that should this woman contract another marriage and thereby prove that such severance was complete, it would be a despicable fastidiousness and a contemptible affectation to tell you *that you must never know matrimonial happiness, but that you must remain in your present false position, a husband without a wife, for the remainder of your days*. Those were the very words which his lordship used, Charles, on the occasion to which I am alluding."

"Oh! am I to understand—" exclaimed the young man.

"Silence!" interrupted Mr. Hatfield: "be not impatient nor impetuous—but hear me out. Lord Ellingham continued to observe that if the woman should contract a new marriage, and if *you*, Charles, manifested contrition for the past,—if your conduct were such as to afford sure guarantees for the future,—and if your attachment for Lady Frances should revive,—under all those circumstances the Earl declared that he should not consider himself justified in stamping the unhappiness alike of yourself and his daughter by refusing his consent to your union."

"Do I hear aright?" exclaimed Charles, a giddiness coming over him through excessive joy. "Oh! what generosity on the part of the Earl!"

"Yes—his sentiments on this subject were fraught with liberality," returned Mr. Hatfield. "He argued in the following manner:—A young man is ensnared into an alliance with a woman whom he believed to be pure, but whom in a few hours he discovered to be a demon of pollution. They separate upon written conditions of the most positive character,—a private arrangement being deemed preferable to the public scandal of an appeal to the tribunals. This woman marries again—and every remnant of a claim which she might have had upon the individual whom she had ensnared and deluded, ceases at once. There is a complete snapping of the bond—a total severance of the tie; and her conduct by the fact of the second marriage proves that she so understands it. The law may certainly proclaim the first marriage to be the only legal one: but morality, which holds marriage to be a covenant between two parties, revolts against the principle which the code establishes. It is upon these grounds that the Earl of Ellingham will give you the hand of his lovely and amiable daughter."

It were useless to attempt to describe the joy

which filled the soul of Charles Hatfield when these tidings met his ears. He seized his father's hand and pressed it to his lips with grateful fervour: then, promising to return in a few minutes, he flew to the library where he understood the Earl to be at the moment; and casting himself at the feet of that good nobleman, he implored pardon for his past conduct, declaring that nothing should induce him to swerve from the path of rectitude in future.

The Earl of Ellingham raised the contrite young man—embraced him affectionately—and bade him throw a complete veil over all that related to his unfortunate marriage. His lordship then repeated, but more concisely, the observations which Mr. Hatfield had already made to his son; and at the conclusion of the interview he said, "And now, Charles, if your inclinations really and truly prompt you to take the step, you have my permission to solicit Lady Frances to allow you to become the suitor for her hand."

Captain Hatfield expressed his liveliest gratitude in suitable terms; and hastening back to his father, he narrated all that had just occurred between himself and the Earl. Mr. Hatfield was cheered and delighted by the spectacle of his son's happiness, and bade him repair to the drawing-room to pass an hour with the ladies.

We need scarcely state that Lady Georgiana was much pleased by the return of Charles to England, especially as he had so highly distinguished himself in the Neapolitan campaign. Nor less was the Countess of Ellingham—the amiable Esther—gratified by an event which restored the missing one to the family circle: while Lady Frances attempted not to conceal the joy that the young soldier's presence afforded her.

It is not, however, our purpose to dwell upon this subject:—for we have now to relate an incident which led to consequences of great importance to several persons who have figured in our narrative.

The day after Charles Hatfield's arrival in London, he was proceeding on foot up Regent Street, in order to pay a visit to his tailor for the purpose of making some additions to his wardrobe, when he met Captain Barthelma: for Laura's husband had lost his title of Count of Carignano, in consequence of the establishment of the Republic in Castelvicala.

The young Italian was alone; and the meeting between the two was most friendly and cordial,—for during the short time that they were acquainted, Charles had observed many excellent qualities on the part of Barthelma, who on his side was enraptured with the heroic conduct that Captain Hatfield had displayed at the battle of Sabino, a full narrative of which had duly appeared in the English newspapers.

Taking the arm of Charles, Captain Barthelma walked with him up Regent Street; and for some time they conversed upon the late Neapolitan campaign—the glorious destinies of Republican Castelvicala—the noble conduct of President Markham—and various other matters connected with the Italian's native land.

"It has grieved me greatly in one sense," observed Barthelma, "that I should have been absent from my post about the person of General Markham at a time when such momentous incidents were taking place. But on the other hand I rejoice in my withdrawal from that hero's service, inasmuch as I



thereby secured the hand of one of the most lovely—nay, *the* most lovely woman in the world."

"I congratulate you most sincerely upon having formed an alliance which appears to afford you so much happiness," answered Charles; "and I hope to have the honour of being presented to the signora—for I presume you have espoused a lady belonging to your own country."

"No—she is an Englishwoman," returned Captain Barthelma; "and you have seen her."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Charles.

"Yes—you have seen her," repeated the Italian. "But tell me—do you recollect that day when you, Lieutenant Di Ponta, and myself walked together in the Champs Elysées in consequence of a mysterious note which we received from a pretended Spanish refugee—"

"Oh! yes—yes—I well remember that day!" exclaimed Captain Hatfield. "Indeed, how could I ever forget it?"

"You speak with excitement, my dear friend," said Barthelma, surprised at his companion's man-

ner, but entertaining not the slightest suspicion of the real cause of his agitation.

"Ah! if you only knew all!" observed the young man. "But I will tell you enough to warn you against falling into the power of the vilest woman that ever wore an angel shape to conceal a demon heart: I will reveal to you sufficient to place you on your guard against that syren, should you ever happen to encounter her. For her disposition is such that, to gratify her wantonness, her caprice, or her avarice, she would as readily prey upon a married as on an unmarried man."

"Indeed! you interest me," said the Castelficalan, still altogether unsuspecting of the real meaning of the allusion.

"Yes—but the interest will soon become of an appalling character," resumed Charles, speaking in a tone of deep solemnity. "For there is in the world a woman whose loveliness is so superhuman and whose witchery is so irresistible that she would move the heart of an anchorite. This woman was born in Newgate, where her mother was incarce-

rated on a charge of forgery, and whence she was soon afterwards transported to Australia. The child was called *Perdita*, or 'The Lost One,' and the mother took the babe with her to her place of exile. Years passed away—and *Perdita* had grown up to a lovely girl. But the natural wantonness of her disposition manifested itself at a very early age; and her profligacy soon became notorious at Sydney. Well, in due time the mother returned to England, *Perdita* accompanying her; and in London did those women commence their grand scheme of preying upon the public. Alas! shall I confess how weak—how mad—how insensate I was? But the delirium has passed away—and I now look back upon it with a loathing which prevents me from contemplating it coolly. For I was ensnared by that vile *Perdita*—and I became her victim. I proceeded with her to Paris; and my father followed to rescue me from ruin. He discovered the place of our abode, and painted the character of that woman in such frightful—such appalling colours, without the least exaggeration, that I was reduced to despair on account of the conduct which I had pursued. I quitted Paris—returned to London—and was then received into the service of General Markham. But you ere now asked me if I remembered the day when yourself *Di Ponta*, and I walked together in the Champs Elysées. You shall now judge whether I have reason to retain the incident in my memory. For you, *Barthelma*, cannot have forgotten that lady who so much attracted your notice, and who purposely let fall her parasol — But, heavens! what is the matter with you?" ejaculated Captain Hatfield, perceiving that his companion started as if a ghastly spectre had suddenly sprung up before him.

"My God! is it possible?—that woman—in the Champs Elysées—" gasped the young Italian, a deadly pallor overspreading his countenance, while he staggered backward and would have fallen had not Charles sustained him by the arm.

"That woman—for a lady I can scarcely call her—was *Perdita Mortimer*," said Hatfield, emphatically.

"Oh! malediction upon the hateful syren!" exclaimed *Barthelma*, terribly excited.

"Compose yourself!—what is the matter?" cried Charles. "You will attract observation—the people will notice you —"

"I am composed—yes, I am cool and collected now," murmured the unhappy young Italian, all his tremendous imprudence bursting upon his comprehension like a thunder-storm. "Here—let us pass up this street—it is comparatively deserted—and we can converse more at our ease," he faltered painfully, as he dragged his companion up New Burlington Street.

A suspicion had in the meantime flashed to the imagination of Charles Hatfield. Was it possible that *Barthelma* could have married the profligate *Perdita*, or *Laura*? He himself had not learnt from his father how he knew that the syren-demoness was married again, or whom she had thus ensnared;—and the Italian's sudden excitement could not be accounted for otherwise than by the fact that he had made her his wife.

"My God! this intelligence is overwhelming!" murmured Captain *Barthelma*. "Oh! my dear friend," he exclaimed, turning with the abruptness of an almost maddening excitement towards Hatfield, "pity me—pity me: that woman of whom you have spoken is —"

"Is what?" demanded Charles impatiently.

"My wife!" responded *Barthelma*;—and the moment the words were uttered his excitement gave way to a blank despair.

"Malediction upon my communicativeness—my insane garrulity!" ejaculated Charles. "I shall never—never forgive myself for having made these most uncalled-for revelations!"

"Do not blame yourself, my dear friend," returned the young Italian, in a tone of the deepest melancholy: "you knew not how painfully your words would affect me—you could not anticipate that the warning which you generously intended to convey would come far too late!"

"And, after all, there may be some error—some mistake," cried Charles, catching at a straw on behalf of his afflicted companion: "the woman whom I mean may not be the same as the lady whom you have espoused —"

"Yes—yes: 'tis the same!" ejaculated the Italian, impatiently: "*Laura Mortimer*—the beautiful creature whom we saw in the Champs Elysées, and whose mother met with a horrible death some months ago."

"Ah! that old woman is no more!" exclaimed Charles. "But of what nature was the death of which you speak so shudderingly?"

"The frightful incident occurred when you were in Italy," answered *Barthelma*. "Some villain broke a bottle of aqua-fortis or vitriol over her head—and she died in fearful agonies. But I must leave you now, my dear friend," said the Castellan, with wild abruptness of manner; and hastily wringing both of Hatfield's hands, he darted away and was out of sight in a few moments.

CHAPTER CCVII.

MR. GREEN'S OFFICE.

ON the same morning, and at about the same time that Charles Hatfield and Captain *Barthelma* thus encountered each other in Regent Street, certain incidents of importance to the thread of our narrative occurred elsewhere.

We must request the reader to accompany us to a newly fitted up suite of offices in Warwick Court, Holborn; and in the private room we shall find Mr. Green seated at a desk covered with papers.

A material alteration had taken place in the external appearance of this individual. He was well dressed—looked clean and neat—and wore an air of assurance instead of the downcast, obsequious, grovelling demeanour that had characterised him when in the service of Mr. Heathcote.

His private room was neatly furnished and had a business-like aspect: in the front office two clerks were busily employed in drawing up statements to be laid before counsel in several heavy suits; and in the passage outside a process-server was waiting for instructions.

Mr. Green had drawn his table near the fire that blazed in the grate—for the reader must remember that several months had elapsed since the adventures of this individual with Jack Rily, and it was now the commencement of February, 1847.

The cheerful flames roared half-way up the chimney;—and as Green felt the genial heat diffusing a glow throughout his frame, he smiled triumphantly as he contrasted his present position

with what it was in those times when he was compelled to sit without a fire, from nine in the morning till six in the evening, on the hard high stool in Heathcote's front office. Now he was a solicitor on his own account—had his name once more in the Law List—could look with complacency into his banker's book—and, when business was over for the day, had nothing to do but to step into an omnibus and ride as far as the door of his neat little dwelling at Bayswater.

No wonder, then, that Mr. Green's countenance had lost its downcast look and its haggard, broken-hearted expression: no wonder that hope beamed in his eyes, and that his tone and manner had recovered the assurance, if not the actual dignity, of former days.

On the particular morning of which we are writing, Mr. Green was more than usually elate; and as he looked over the papers that lay before him, the inward exultation which he experienced imparted the glow of animation to his features.

Presently the door opened and his junior clerk appeared, saying, "Mr. Heathcote, sir."

"Let him walk in," returned Green, assuming a cold tone: but his heart was palpitating violently with mingled feelings of joy, triumph, and insatiate revenge.

In a few moments James Heathcote entered the room.

But, oh! how changed was that man, not only in countenance but also in deportment! His face was thin—haggard—care-worn: his eyes, sunken in their sockets, were dim and glazed;—his form was bowed;—and in the course of a few months his hair had turned from an iron grey to a stainless white. His aspect was deplorable; and his manner was indicative of deep mental distress—anxiety—suffering—and humiliation.

"Sit down, sir," said Green, in a patronising tone.

Heathcote placed his hat upon the floor and took a chair: then, fixing his hollow eyes upon his ex-clerk, he was about to open his business—but, unable to bear up against the tide of reminiscences that rushed to his soul, he burst into tears.

Green affected not to notice this ebullition of grief; but deliberately poked the fire.

For a few minutes the old lawyer sat sobbing in the presence of the man whom he had trampled upon during the long period of his vassalage; and at length recovering sufficient composure to enable his tongue to give utterance to the ideas that were uppermost, he said, "Mr. Green, you are doubtless astonished to receive a visit from me!"

"Not at all, sir: I expected it," was the laconic reply.

"And wherefore should you have expected it?" asked Heathcote, anxiously.

"Because the result of yesterday's trial in the Court of Queen's Bench places you completely in the power of my victorious client," responded Green; "and you are likewise well aware that every other action pending against you must be decided in the same manner."

"Yes—I cannot close my eyes to that fact," observed Heathcote, actually wringing his hands.

"And therefore you are ruined—totally ruined," returned Green, with a demoniac smile of triumph.

"Ruined—totally ruined!" repeated Heathcote, with that mechanical unconsciousness which is indicative of despair—blank despair.

"Not only ruined in pocket, but in character likewise," resumed Green, his tone becoming merciless—nay, absolutely savage and ferocious. "That long trial of yesterday—a trial which occupied eight hours—revealed you in your true colours to all the world. The counsel whom I employed, tore you to pieces. All your chicanery was unravelled—all your manœuvres traced, followed up, and exposed—all your fraudulent proceedings dragged to light. Oh! you, who never spared a human being, Mr. Heathcote, were not spared yesterday: you, who never pitied a living soul, were not pitied yesterday! The barrister resembled a giant, and you a dwarf whom he held up writhing and shrieking in presence of the whole court—aye, the whole country. Every newspaper published this morning, contains a long account of the proceedings;—and by this time your character stinks in the nostrils of the entire profession."

"Then am I not sufficiently punished, Mr. Green?" asked Heathcote, the tears rolling down his thin, emaciated, and sallow countenance. "Since you first commenced these numerous suits against me, I have not known a moment's peace. Sleep has scarcely ever visited my pillow: the awful gulph of infamy and disgrace was always yawning at my feet. Look at me, Mr. Green—look at me! Am I not changed? My God! I am twenty years older than I was on that day when you quitted me in such anger and with such dreadful threats!"

"And those threats shall be fulfilled to the very letter—yes, to the very letter," said Mr. Green, in a tone of unmitigated bitterness. "I told you that there should be war between us—war to the very knife;—and I have kept my word! I told you that ere a few months had elapsed, you would bitterly repent your conduct to one who only asked for a little kindness in return for his faithful services;—and you have already repented! But my memory is immortal, Mr. Heathcote—and I can never, never forget the injuries, the insults, the degradations, and the wrongs I have received at your hands. My thirst for revenge is therefore insatiable—and this very day shall I adopt another and still more important proceeding with regard to you."

"My God! all this amounts to a persecution!" ejaculated Heathcote, literally writhing upon his chair.

"Call it what you will, sir," responded Green, savagely: "no words—no entreaties—no menaces—no prayers on your part can stay me in the course which I am adopting."

"And that course?" said Heathcote, shuddering with apprehension.

"Is an indictment at the Old Bailey for conspiracy," answered Green.

"No—no: you cannot do it!" cried Heathcote, now becoming dreadfully excited.

"You are lawyer enough to know that I can do it," rejoined Green, with a smile of infernal triumph. "The evidence obtained from yesterday's proceedings inculpated another person with you in the fraud—the damnable fraud that you practised upon my client years ago; and at this very moment my clerks are drawing up the statement to be submitted to counsel with a view to an indictment against yourself and your accomplice!"

"I could have borne everything but this!" exclaimed the miserable man, covering his face with his two thin hands, and then shaking his head wildly, as if in a species of hysteria.

"Yes—and you suspected that such would be the course that I should adopt," resumed Green: "for it is precisely the measure that you yourself would have taken in similar circumstances. What you have done to others, Mr. Heathcote, shall now be done to you;—and it were as reasonable to implore the forbearance of a ravenous tiger, as to appeal to me for mercy!"

"One word, Mr. Green—one word!" ejaculated Heathcote, starting from his seat. "I will at once—yes, this very moment—surrender up all the various sums and properties you claim on behalf of the numerous clients whom you represent *against* me,—I will satisfy and liquidate all your demands—leaving myself a beggar—yes, a beggar upon the face of the earth—on condition that you abandon this criminal prosecution!"

"Peruse that list of my clients and the amount of their claims," said Green, handing the wretched man a paper.

"The sum is enormous—frightful!" exclaimed Heathcote, his countenance becoming hideous to gaze upon.

"And to that amount must be added a thousand pounds to satisfy me for the costs which I shall lose by the compromise," returned Green, with implacable coldness both of tone and manner.

"As God is my judge, I cannot command that additional thousand pounds which you stipulate for!" cried Heathcote, trembling with nervous excitement.

"Then apply to your brother, Sir Gilbert," responded Green, a sardonic smile curling his lips.

"He is not in England—he has gone abroad, I know not whither!" exclaimed the miserable man. "Months have now elapsed since his mistress became reconciled to her husband, the Marquis of Delmour—and Gilbert suddenly quitted England about the same time. He refused to see me previous to his departure: he rejected my proposals—my humble proposals for a reconciliation. Therefore, were I even acquainted with his present abode, it would be useless and vain to apply to him for succour."

"Thus is it that all your grand schemes—your magnificent designs—your comprehensive plans, have fallen in with a tremendous crash, burying you in the ruins!" said Green, in a slow and measured tone that was torturing and intolerable with its diabolical sardonicism. "Well," he continued, after a few moments' pause, "I will renounce the demand of the thousand pounds, on condition that you at once—and ere you quit my presence—assign all your property, of whatever kind, with a view to the liquidation of these claims and the settlement of all the suits pending against you."

"I will do so," said Heathcote, "provided that you give me an undertaking to abandon all criminal proceedings against me."

"Agreed," was the response; and the two lawyers drew up certain documents which they forthwith exchanged: and we may observe that whereas Green's handwriting was firm, clear, and legible, that of his discomfited opponent was trembling, blotted, and indicative of a terrible excitement.

"My ruin—my utter ruin is now consummated!" groaned Heathcote, wringing his hands bitterly. "All that I had heaped up for my old age—"

"And that you had obtained at the sacrifice of the happiness of hundreds," interrupted Green, his tone suddenly assuming the savage triumph of one

who gloats over the downfall of a hated enemy. "But we will not prolong our interview, sir. The day of retribution has come at last—and in a few minutes I have wreaked the pent-up vengeance of long years. Begone, sir—offend me not another moment with your presence! My head clerk shall accompany you to your own office in order that you may place in his hands the securities and the documents specified in the agreement that you have given me."

Heathcote made no reply: but turning hastily away, took his departure, followed by Green's managing man, who received the necessary instructions from his master.

Scarcely had the ruined lawyer thus quitted the establishment of his flourishing and merciless oppressor, when a lady wearing a thick black veil entered the front office and requested an immediate interview with Mr. Green. The junior clerk delivered this message to his employer, and the lady was forthwith introduced to the legal gentleman's presence in the comfortable back room.

A rapid glance at his visitress convinced Mr. Green that she was likely to prove no ordinary client: for the elegance of her dress, the gracefulness of her demeanour, and the dignity of her gait bespoke a lady of distinction;—and when, on taking the chair which he hastened to place for her accommodation, she raised her veil, he was struck by the transcendent beauty of the countenance thus revealed to him.

"We are alone together, sir," said the lovely stranger, looking intently around: "but can listeners overhear anything that may pass between us?"

"There is no need of apprehension on that head, madam," answered Green. "Speak freely—and without reserve."

"I have called upon business of great importance to myself, and which may prove most lucrative to you," continued the lady.

"Before we proceed farther, madam," said the lawyer, "may I request to be informed who recommended you to me?"

"A client of your's who resides in Pimlico, and with whom I am acquainted," answered the beautiful woman. "Perhaps you have heard mention made of my name. I was the Countess of Carignano: but I presume that, since my husband's native land has become a Republic and abolished titles of nobility, I must introduce myself to you as Signora Barthelma."

"I have heard of you, madam," responded Green: "and I shall be delighted to number you amongst my clients."

"It is for this purpose that I have addressed myself to you to-day," observed Laura. "But I must at once inform you that the object of my visit is scarcely connected with law."

"If I can serve you, madam——" began Green, who was completely fascinated by her beauty and her manners.

"And serve yourself also?" added Laura: "yes—you can do both! Know, then, that I cherish a rancorous—burning hatred against two individuals—father and son—and that the time has now come for me to wreak my vengeance upon them. The son has just returned from Italy—I saw his arrival mentioned in this morning's paper; and not another day, not another hour can I rest ere a train be laid that must lead to the explosion of all the happiness they now expect to enjoy."

"And who are these persons, madam?" asked Green.

"Their name is Hatfield—and they reside at the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham, in Pall Mall," responded Laura. "I am acquainted with a terrific secret regarding that family—a secret which would make the hair of all England's proud aristocracy stand on end—a secret, in fine, that now affords me the means of humbling my two mortal enemies in the dust. Will you, sir, become the instrument of my vengeance?—will you perform my bidding in all respects? I know that I ask a great deal—that I am about to involve you in no trifling nor unimportant enterprise—and that the business does not with propriety come within the sphere of your professional avocations. But the recompense shall be most liberal; and I proffer this note for five hundred pounds as an earnest of my intentions in that respect."

Green's eyes glistened at the sight of this generous gift; and he hastened to assure Signora Barthelma that he not only undertook her business with cheerfulness, but would enter into it with as much enthusiasm as if he were interested in it from personal feeling.

"I thought that I was not deceived in your character, from what I had heard," observed Laura. "For let there be no mistake nor misunderstanding between us, Mr. Green," she continued, fixing her fine, large grey eyes intently upon him: "*you* have no objection to make money—I have money to dispense amongst those who serve me;—*you* will not feel qualmish nor entertain a maudlin sentiment of honour in matters that are likely to prove lucrative—and *I* am ready to pay handsomely for the assistance which you can render me."

"Proceed, madam," said Green: "we understand each other."

"Good!" ejaculated Laura; "and now listen attentively. I am about to communicate to you secrets of the most startling character; and it is by the use which must be made of those revelations, that my vengeance is to be gratified. At the same time you are to act in this matter without suffering it to be known that you are instigated by me. If questioned respecting the manner in which you became acquainted with these tremendous secrets, you must give some evasive reply; and if my name be suggested as your probable informant, you must declare boldly that you never even heard of me in your life. For those whom I am anxious to crush—overwhelm—and cover with confusion, might tell certain tales of a disagreeable nature concerning myself: but if they be kept in ignorance that it is I who am in the background, they will remain silent in these respects. You see that I am candid with you, Mr. Green."

"And that very frankness, madam, renders me the more anxious to serve you," answered the unprincipled attorney.

"Thanks for this assurance," said Laura, delighted at having found so ready and willing an instrument to carry out her vindictive designs. "And now for these tremendous secrets to which I have already alluded! Learn, then, that the elder Mr. Hatfield of whom I have spoken, and who is a gentleman apparently of high respectability and enjoying a good reputation,—learn, I say, that he is in reality none other than the celebrated highwayman Thomas Rainford of former times! Yes—you may well start and be amazed,

Mr. Green," continued Laura, emphatically: "but it is the truth—the solemn truth! And it is nothing to that revelation which I have next to make. For this Mr. Hatfield, or rather Thomas Rainford, was the elder son of the late Earl of Ellingham; and, being legitimately born, he is the rightful possessor of the peerage and the entailed estates."

"This is most wonderful!" ejaculated Green, staring almost stupidly with amazement.

"I have yet other revelations to make," continued Laura, in a tone of subdued triumph. "Thomas Rainford married a certain Lady Georgiana Hatfield, and adopted *her* name. They have a son, whose name is Charles, and who passes as their nephew, because he is illegitimate. It is this son whose arrival in London yesterday is announced in this morning's journals. The same paragraph which records his return from Italy, hints at the probability of his shortly leading Lady Frances Ellingham to the altar. You know the sickening, fulsome terms in which such matters are glanced at in the department of fashionable intelligence? But before such marriage shall take place, it is my purpose to carry woe—desolation of heart—infamy—disgrace—and the deepest, deepest humiliation into that proud mansion! I care not that these Hatfields should remain in ignorance of the fact that it is really I who strike the blow: 'twill be sufficient for me to be convinced that the blow itself is struck. Do you begin to comprehend me?"

"I understand you altogether and completely, madam!" exclaimed Green. "You would have me repair forthwith to Ellingham House, and by seeking some cause of dispute with one or more of its inmates, seize the opportunity to proclaim aloud all the tremendous secrets which you have just revealed to me. Is not this your purpose?"

"It is," responded Laura: then, in a lower but more emphatic tone, she added, "And take care that the whole proceeding be accompanied with such circumstances of notoriety, that it must inevitably engage the attention of the public press. In a word, contrive that all those revelations shall appear in print, Mr. Green; and a thousand guineas shall be your recompense!"

"It shall be done, madam—it shall be done," answered the lawyer, his heart exulting at the idea of the munificent reward thus promised.

"To-morrow I shall visit you again," said Laura. "But remember, this affair rests between you and me! Should you ever encounter me when I am walking or riding out with my husband, you will not appear to know me: we are strangers to each other everywhere save within the four walls of this room!"

"I understand and will obey all your wishes, madam," returned Green.

The lovely but vindictive and profligate woman then took her departure; and the lawyer lost no time in repairing to Pall Mall.

CHAPTER CCVIII.

PERDITA, THE LOST ONE!

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon when Laura reached the villa on Westbourne Terrace; and, having laid aside her bonnet and handsome

furs, she proceeded to the drawing-room, where, as Rosalie had already informed her, her husband Lorenzo was anxiously awaiting her presence.

The fact that he should have stated to the servant his desire that she would speedily return home, was a proceeding so unusual on his part, appearing, as it did, to imply annoyance at her absence, that it roused the haughty temper of the imperious Laura; and for the first time since their marriage, she wore a frown upon her features when she entered his presence.

It was also for the first time that his handsome countenance denoted a storm raging within his breast, and all the pent-up violence of which was about to explode against the deceitful, wanton creature into whose character he had obtained so complete but fatal an insight that morning.

"You have been asking for me, Lorenzo?" said Laura, in a cold tone, as she seated herself with an air of exhaustion upon a sofa.

"Yes, madam—I was most anxious to see you as soon as possible," answered the Italian, turning abruptly away from the window at which he had been standing, and now advancing towards her. "When I came home an hour ago I was surprised to find that you had been absent since mid-day."

"And pray, Lorenzo, am I to be kept a prisoner in this house?" demanded Laura, in a tone of unfeigned surprise. "I had certain purchases to make at different shops—and I went out in the carriage for the purpose. Permit me to observe that your conduct is undignified in the extreme, since you so far forget yourself as to express your feelings to my lady's-maid."

"My God! and were I to proclaim my feelings to the whole world, there would be but little cause for wonder!" exclaimed the Italian, vehemently; and as he spoke, he thrust his hand into his bosom, and clutched a dagger which he had concealed there.

But his eyes fell upon the countenance of his wife,—that countenance so glorious in its beauty, though now with the sombre cloud overshadowing it;—and he would have slain her then and there, had not his glance thus suddenly embraced all the loveliness of her features and all the rich contours of her splendid form. For, like a whelming tide, rushed to his soul a thousand tender reminiscences,—vividly recalling to his imagination all the joys and delights he had experienced in her arms—the fervid passion he had seen reflected in those magnificent eyes—the luscious kisses he had imprinted on those lips—the wanton playfulness with which her long luxuriant hair had oft-times swept across his cheeks—the ineffable bliss that had filled his raptured soul when his head was pillowed on that glowing, swelling bosom, which now palpitated with haughty indignation,—oh! he thought of all this, and he felt that he could not slay one so exquisitely lovely—so transcendently beautiful!

"Assuredly, your humour is strange to-day, Lorenzo," said Laura, who, though longing to make it up with the man whom she really and sincerely loved, nevertheless was resolved to exact the homage which all women under such circumstances require—namely, the first overture towards a reconciliation. "At one moment your eyes glare savagely upon me as if I had given you some mortal offence;—and now they assume an expression of pity and commiseration. Come, sir, confess that you have entertained some outrageous

suspicion—that you are jealous of me—and I shall take the avowal as a proof of affection. Do this," she added, a faint smile of encouragement appearing upon her lips, and allowing a glimpse of her brilliant teeth; "do this, Lorenzo—and I will pardon your unkindness."

"Pardon me!" exclaimed the Italian, bitterly—for the conduct of his wife now appeared to him to be aggravated by levity and flippancy of the most irritating nature, though in reality she was totally ignorant of the fact that grave and serious charges were agitating in his mind against her: "pardon me!" he repeated, his tone now assuming a fierceness that began to amaze and even alarm the young woman, whose conscience, as the reader is well aware, was not the clearest in the world. "Oh! this is indeed a hideous mockery—a cool, deliberate insult," he continued,—"yes—a vile insult, to offer to pardon me! What have I ever done to offend you—or merit your forbearance or your forgiveness? My God! 'tis I who have been generous and confiding—and 'tis you who have been the gross deceiver and the unprincipled hypocrite!"

"These are harsh words, Lorenzo," exclaimed Laura, rising from the sofa, and drawing herself up to her full height; and though not tall in stature, there was nevertheless something regal and majestically imperious in her air and bearing: "yes—they are harsh words, I repeat—and they may lead to a quarrel which no subsequent regrets nor apologies can repair."

"Let the quarrel be eternal—or to the very death!" returned Lorenzo, his handsome countenance now distorted with rage. "Oh! I am sick of this world with its hideous deceits—its hollow hearts—its boundless profligacy! I care not how soon I throw off the coil of this life's trammels: but with my last breath shall I curse—bitterly, bitterly curse—the odious name of *Perdita*!"

"Ah!" ejaculated the guilty woman, now perceiving that she was indeed unmasked: but almost immediately recovering her self-possession, she approached her husband and said in her softest, most seductive tones, "You have heard evil reports concerning me, Lorenzo; and I hope ere you prejudge me, that I shall be allowed an opportunity to give a full explanation. Consider my position:—it is that of a friendless and orphan woman, about to lose, perhaps, the only being on earth whom she ever loved, or who has ever sincerely loved her!"

"Oh! how is it that such a demon heart is harboured in such an angelic form!" cried Lorenzo Barthelma, surveying her for a moment with mingled pity and admiration: then immediately afterwards, a full sense of all her tremendous profligacy and deceit springing up in his soul, his eyes glared upon her with the ferocity of a lynx, and a feeling of deep and burning hatred took possession of him.

"If you refuse me a hearing—if you intend to cast me off with contumely and insult," said *Perdita*, her own eyes flashing fire in their turn—but it seemed like living fire!—"if such be your intentions," she continued, in a tone of mingled bitterness and haughty indifference, "the sooner this interview be terminated, the better."

And she advanced towards the door, her bosom heaving with convulsions almost to bursting from its confinement.

"No—no—you shall not leave me yet, nor thus!" cried the Italian, darting after and catching her violently by the arm. "You *shall* have the opportunity of explanation which you desire; and God help you in the task!"

Thus speaking he forced her back to the sofa; and then locked the door of the apartment, putting the key in his pocket.

"This behaviour on your part, signor," said Perdita, assuming a composure which she did not—could not feel, "is alike mean and cowardly. You seek to intimidate me—and that is mean: you use violence towards me—and that is cowardly. What have you heard against me? Name the calumniator, and recite the calumnies. But if the accusation resolve itself into *this*,—that I was frail—weak—unchaste before I became your wife, remember that I never deceived you on that subject! You yourself were my paramour before you were my husband; and when you offered me your hand, I reminded you that it was no virgin-bride whom you would receive to the bridal-bed. Ere now you called me *Perdita*—and I admit that such is my Christian name. But am I responsible for the circumstances which induced my mother to bestow it upon me? You are doubtless aware, from the same source whence you have gleaned evil tidings concerning me, that I was born in Newgate, and that my mother's parent gave me that odious name in a moment of contrition. Well—is this my fault? Be just, Lorenzo—I do not ask you to be generous;—but again I say, be just!"

"I have listened to you with attention, Perdita—and I am bound to declare that you seek to veil a hideous depravity beneath the most specious sophistry," said Bartholma, speaking in a slow, measured tone, but with a concentrated fury in his soul. "I do not reproach you for your mother's crimes—I commiserate you on that score. But I feel indignant—oh! bitterly, bitterly indignant at all the treachery—the perfidy you have practised towards me! I knew that you were unchaste, as you yourself express it—but I believed that it was mere frailty on your part, and not inveterate profligacy? Oh! Perdita, how dared you bring to the marriage-bed of an honourable man a body polluted with all the vice and iniquity of a penal colony, and which had been for years common as that of the vilest prostitute? I gave you a noble name—circumstances have robbed it of its aristocratic lustre—but it is still honourable;—and now how is it menaced? You have lavished your favours upon hundreds—you have led a life of such frightful wantonness, young in years as you are, that your soul has grown old in iniquity! Oh! I know it all—I know everything, Perdita: all the intricacies of your character are revealed to me—I have read the mysteries of its darkest depths—and my eyes are at length opened to the astounding folly that I perpetrated in linking my fate with such as you!"

"Then let us separate at once," exclaimed Perdita, her cheeks flushing with indignation. "Wherefore prolong this interview? Our quarrel has gone too far and become too serious ever to admit of pardon or oblivion."

"It is not I who will seek such reconciliation," returned Bartholma, with terrible malignity in his tone and manner. "I loved you, Perdita—God only knows how tenderly, how sincerely, how devotedly I loved you: I would have died for you—aye, and

should have rejoiced to surrender up my life, could such a sacrifice have benefitted you! Confident, frank, and full of generous candour, I gave you the love of an honourable man;—and you deceived me! Oh! I am now no stranger to all your syren wiles—your Circean witcheries: I recognise all that artifice and all that duplicity in many of the circumstances which marked our first meetings, and which rivetted the chains that you threw around me. What! do you suppose that I can consent to live and become the scorn, the laughing-stock, and the scandal of all who know me?—and think you that I will permit *you* to go forth into the world and point me out with taunting finger to the first idiot whom you may win as your paramour? My God! the thought is maddening—it sears my very brain!"

And so terrible became the young Italian's aspect,—with his flashing eyes, convulsing countenance, and quivering lips,—that Perdita, now seriously alarmed, rushed to the door, forgetting that it was locked.

But it opened not to her touch, and, with a cry of terror, she turned towards her husband, who was evidently exercising superhuman efforts to restrain the fury that boiled in his breast and darted in lightning-shafts from his wild eyes.

"O Lorenzo—Lorenzo!" she exclaimed, joining her hands together; "what do you mean to do?—what is it that you require of me? My God! I know that I have been wicked—vile—profligate: but I have been faithful to you—I have never ceased to love you from the first moment we met! That day in the Champs Elysées has ever been a bright one—aye, the brightest on which my retrospective looks could dwell—"

"That day in the Champs Elysées," repeated Bartholma, in a low and hollow tone, "is one accursed in my memory and in my life! Wretch—profligate—shameless wanton," he exclaimed, all his infuriate passion now bursting forth,—“how dare you allude to that day?—how can you think of it without the crimson blush of shame? For whose sake did you deck yourself out so meretriciously on that occasion?—whose jealousy was it to inspire, that you bent your warm and lustful looks on me that day?—whom to beguile and win back to your arms, perhaps, was that deceptive note written that induced me, Di Ponta, and Charles Hatfield—"

"Ah! then you know every thing!" exclaimed Perdita, suddenly throwing off the suppliant air and the appealing looks which she had ere now assumed, and resolving to act with the energy natural to her character. "It is useless, signor, to prolong this painful interview: I have already made the same observation—and I now wish you to understand that I will not remain a prisoner any longer here. Open that door and let me depart—or I shall summon the servants."

Thus speaking, she advanced towards the bell-pull.

"You menace me—you dare to menace me?" exclaimed Bartholma, springing forward and confronting her so as to bar the way; and his whole frame was quivering with a rage that appeared ready to burst forth into the ungovernable fury of a perfect madness.

"How dare you thus coerce me?" demanded Perdita, her eyes flashing fire. "Out of my path, coward—unless you intend to enact the Italian

brave in this country where men are wont to be brave and chivalrous."

And, as she spoke, she pushed him disdainfully aside.

But ere the eye had time to wink or the heart to palpitate once—and while a sound, between a cry and a yell, of frenzied rage burst from the lips of the maddened Barthelma,—his dagger flashed before the sight of Perdita, and was instantly buried deep in her bosom.

A thrilling, agonising scream proclaimed her mortal agony—then ceased suddenly; and, staggering forward a few paces, she fell heavily on the carpet—and expired!

Barthelma stood for a few moments rivetted to the spot, silent and motionless with horror at the deed which he had perpetrated; while in his soul a revulsion of feeling took place with the overwhelming rapidity that marks the ebb of a portentous tide.

A mortal dread came over him—and then he burst into an agony of tears; and throwing himself on the still palpitating body of her whose wondrous beauty had been his pride and his joy, he began to lament her death in the most passionate terms.

But suddenly there was a sound as of several footsteps rushing up the stairs—and then came a loud knocking at the door, and the voices of the valet, Rosalie, and another servant demanding what was the matter and what meant the piercing scream that had reached their ears.

Then Barthelma recollected that, as a murderer, he would receive a murderer's doom; and in a moment to his appalled soul started up all the grim and terrible array of the criminal tribunal—the executioner—the assembled myriads—and the gibbet!

All the frenzy of his maddening mind returned;—and tearing forth the stiletto from the bosom of his slaughtered wife, he plunged it deep into his own breast.

At the same instant the door of the apartment was forced in; and the horror-stricken domestics caught sight of their master just at the moment that he fell upon the corpse of their mistress!

* * * * *

So perished this youthful pair,—each endowed with a beauty of no ordinary kind!

Yes—thus died the tender, impassioned Lorenzo, and the profligate, wanton Perdita!

The world has seen no loveliness superior to hers, nor known a depravity more inveterate.

But was she to be blamed only, and not pitied in the slightest degree? It were unjust thus to regard her memory:—for, when her eyes first saw the light, had some kind hand been nigh to receive the innocent babe—to bear it away from that Newgate-cell which was the ominous scene of its birth—to rear it tenderly and save it from passing in the arms of a felon-mother into a penal settlement,—then to foster and cherish the growing girl with a true maternal care—bend her mind to the contemplation of virtue, and protect it from all bad influences—preserve her soul from the effects of vile examples, and inculcate principles of chastity, rectitude, and religion,—Oh! then would the prison-born Perdita have given by her conduct a refutation to her name, and she would have haply excelled in every accomplishment, every amiable characteristic, and every

endearing qualification that combine like brilliant gems to form for the chaste woman's brow a diadem such as angels wear!

Oh! my Lady Duchess—or you, highborn daughter of some proud Peer whose line of ancestry may be traced back to the period of the Norman Conquest,—look not with unmitigated disgust upon the character of Perdita, the *Lost One*! Let pity temper the feeling;—for—though the truth which we are about to tell may be not over palatable—yet is the moral which the *Lost One's* history affords deserving of consideration. Suppose, my Lady Duchess—or you, highborn maiden,—suppose that either of you had been ushered into this world under such circumstances as those which attended on the birth of Perdita;—suppose that you first saw the light in Newgate—that you had been taken by a vile mother to the far-off place of her exile—that you had been reared where temptations abounded and virtuous influences were unknown—and that every example you had before you was evil and profligate,—what would have been the result? Do not dare to say, my Lady Duchess—or you, highborn maiden—that an innate perception of right and wrong, and a natural inclination to virtue, would have preserved you pure, and chaste, and untainted throughout the terrible ordeal! No—no—you would have fallen as Perdita fell—you would have been dragged through the mire of demoralisation as she was—you would have imbibed the infectious poison of vice as she did,—and, under such circumstances, you, my Lady Duchess—and you, highborn maiden—would have justified and illustrated in your own lives the history of the *Lost One*!

What, then, do we wish to impress upon our readers?—what do we seek to impress upon the Legislature and the Government? That it is better to adopt means to prevent crime, than to study how to punish it when it is committed. We have a thousand laws which proclaim how a man may be sent to the treadmill, or to the hulks, or to the penal colonies, or to the gibbet: but we have none devising measures to keep him away from those places. Everything is to punish—nothing to prevent. The codes are crowded with enactments inflicting penalties upon grown-up criminals,—but do not contain a single statute for the protection of the children of the poor against contamination. Look at those emaciated little beings rolling about all day long in the gutters, or eating the offal off dust-heaps: does the law stretch forth its hand and pluck them out of that filth which is only too painfully emblematic of the moral mire in which their minds are likewise wallowing? No: the law allows them to play on unheeded; but when, a few years afterwards, these unhappy creatures, who can neither read nor write, and have no idea of God nor hope nor heaven, pilfer a slice of rusty bacon or a morsel of cheese from a shop-board in order to satisfy the cravings of hunger—then does the Law thrust forth its long arm and its great hand, and seize upon the victims of — what?—its own neglect!

Yes: these are truths which we are never wearied of insisting upon. Session after session is frittered away in party squabbles; but what remedial steps are taken to moralise, christianise, and civilise the children of the poor?



CHAPTER CCLX.

MR. GREEN'S MISSION.

IN the meantime Mr. Green had taken a cab, and ordered himself to be driven to the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham in Pall Mall.

While he was proceeding thither, he threw himself back in the vehicle and gave way to a variety of pleasurable reflections. He considered his prospects to be most brilliant; and he believed that he was on the high road to amass as considerable a fortune as that which his late master Heathcote had once enjoyed. It was fortunate for him that he had applied to Jack Rily in the hour of his need: the Doctor had proved of the greatest assistance to him;—and he resolved to run down to Woolwich some day and call upon his old friend at the hulks. For Jack Rily had been tried for the murder of Vitriol Bob, and acquitted of the capital charge: but he was condemned to two years' imprisonment in a convictship for manslaughter, the police having appeared to give him a character which by no means recommended him to the good opinion of the jury nor the mercy of the Court. As for the immense quantity

of Bank-notes found upon his person at the time of his arrest, he had positively refused to give any satisfactory account concerning them; and as no one stood forward to claim them, nor to throw any light upon this mysterious subject, they were declared to be forfeited to the Crown on the prisoner's conviction for manslaughter.

Pondering upon these and other matters, Mr. Green arrived in due course at the noble mansion in Pall Mall; and on inquiring for Mr. Hatfield, he was informed that this gentleman was ill in bed.

"But my business is of the most urgent character," said the attorney; "and I must see him."

The domestic to whom this assurance was given, conducted Mr. Green into a parlour, and hastened to report to the Earl of Ellingham the presence of the visitor.

The nobleman accordingly repaired to the room in which Green was waiting, and represented to him that Mr. Hatfield was too much indisposed to receive any stranger.

"If, however," added the Earl, "you will communicate to me the nature of the affair which has brought you hither your object will be gained as

readily as if you saw Mr. Hatfield. He is an intimate friend of mine—indeed, a bosom friend,” said the nobleman, emphatically; “and we have no secrets from each other.”

“I must respectfully decline to open my business to your lordship in the first instance,” returned Mr. Green. “But I should be glad if your lordship would witness what I have to say to Mr. Hatfield.”

“Your card informs me that you are an attorney, sir,” said the Earl of Ellingham: “may I ask if the object of your visit be of a legal nature?—because in that case, you would do well to address yourself to my solicitor.”

“You must excuse me, my lord,” was the laconic answer, “if I decline giving any explanations.”

“Although I consider your behaviour to be far from courteous, Mr. Green,” said the Earl, “I will communicate to Mr. Hatfield your desire to have an interview with him; and perhaps, under the circumstances, he may see you.”

“Good, my lord,” responded the attorney. “I am in no particular hurry—and will cheerfully wait an hour or two in order to have the pleasure of seeing Mr. Hatfield.”

The Earl of Ellingham forthwith repaired to his half-brother's room, and mentioned to him all that had occurred. Mr. Hatfield, though feeling weak after the long illness which he had experienced, considered the behaviour of the visitor to be so extraordinary that it was advisable to grant the interview demanded.

Lord Ellingham accordingly returned to the parlour, and thence conducted the attorney to the chamber where Mr. Hatfield was lying in bed.

The invalid cast a rapid and searching glance at Green as he entered the room; but he recognised in the visitor no one with whom he remembered to have ever been acquainted.

Scarcely was the door closed, when it opened again—and the Countess of Ellingham, accompanied by Lady Georgiana, made her appearance: but, on perceiving a stranger, they both drew back and were about to withdraw.

“There are no secrets here, ladies—no secrets, I can assure you,” exclaimed Mr. Green, with a smirking expression of countenance, which, nevertheless, had a deep malignity in it.

“In that case, come in,” said Lord Ellingham; and the two ladies accordingly entered the room.

“Will you now explain the object of your visit, sir?” asked Mr. Hatfield, who had observed the sinister aspect which the attorney's features had ere now assumed, and who entertained a vague presentiment of evil.

“I must begin by informing you,” said Green, taking a seat, and glancing around on those present, as much as to intimate that he spoke to no one in particular, but was addressing them all collectively,—“I must begin by informing you that I am a very extraordinary person in one respect—which is, that I am constantly ferretting about amongst old papers, musty documents, and ancient records; and while engaged in this occupation I frequently light upon strange secrets—very strange indeed.”

While he was yet uttering these last words, the rapid look which he threw around convinced him that he had already made a most unpleasant impression upon his auditory: for the ladies both turned pale and started—while the Earl and Mr. Hatfield exchanged glances significant of alarm.

“Yes—such is the case,” continued Mr. Green, chuckling inwardly, though maintaining an external composure: “and amongst the most singular—the most astounding of the secrets which I have thus dragged to light, the one that I have discovered in connexion with your lordship's family, is not the least remarkable.”

As he thus spoke, the attorney fixed his eyes upon the nobleman, who coloured deeply in spite of himself: for it naturally struck him that Green alluded to matters with which the reader is already well acquainted. The same apprehension seized upon Hatfield, Lady Georgiana, and the Countess of Ellingham; and the suspense which the lawyer's auditory now endured, was poignant in the extreme.

“Your lordship can of course conjecture to what I allude,” continued Green; “and you, Mr. Hatfield,” he added, turning towards the invalid, “cannot possibly misunderstand me.”

Lady Georgiana rose from the seat which she had taken on entering the room, and proceeded to place herself instinctively as it were near the head of the couch, so as to be close to her husband. It was a movement which said as eloquently as if her lips had simultaneously explained it—“This man means evil: but I am near to console you with all the sympathy of a loving wife.”

“Mr. Green,” exclaimed the Earl of Ellingham, after a few moments' reflection, “I appeal to you whether it will not be better that these matters at which you have glanced should be discussed privately between yourself and me. Mr. Hatfield has been ill—very ill; and it would be cruel to excite him at the moment when he is approaching convalescence.”

“I have already stated to your lordship that whatever communication I have to make must be in the presence of witnesses,” returned the implacable Green. “I presume that this lady,” he added, with a gentle inclination of his head towards the invalid's wife, “is Lady Georgiana Hatfield?”

“You are correct, sir,” observed the lady herself, with a haughty tone and distant manner.

“And this lady is the Countess of Ellingham, doubtless?” said Green, altogether unabashed.

The beautiful Esther bowed in an affirmative reply.

“But what mean these questions, sir?” demanded the Earl, impatiently. “Surely you will not use language that may prove outrageous to the feelings of ladies who have never offended you?”

“If the truths which I am about to utter should prove so very disagreeable to hear, my lord,” responded Green, “they must be equally unpleasant to cherish in the depths of the soul. In a word, you are doubtless all too much accustomed to contemplate these truths to be liable to any startling effect when they are shaped in words and whispered to the ear.”

“This is an insolence of behaviour, sir, which I cannot—will not tolerate,” exclaimed the Earl of Ellingham. “You shall not force your way into the bosom of a family with a view to play upon their feelings with a cruelty that is as refined as it is unaccountable.”

“Very good, my lord,” returned Green, rising from his seat, and taking up his hat; “I can as easily proclaim from the head of the stairs—or in the hall of your mansion—every thing I know rela-

five to your family, as I can talk the matter quietly over with you in this room."

And the villain was moving towards the door, when Lord Ellingham caught him by the arm, saying, "Nay—you must not leave us thus! What object have you in view?—what use do you propose to make of the secrets which you have discovered? Speak frankly—candidly—openly: is it money that you require?"

A new idea flashed to the mind of Mr. Green, as these words fell upon his ears.

By serving Signora Barthelma he would gain a thousand guineas, half of which sum was already in his possession: he had therefore only another five hundred to receive—and it was possible that he might obtain as many thousands by striking a bargain with the nobleman and making a market of the secrets in his possession.

"Wherefore does your lordship ask me if I require money?" he demanded, by way of founding the Earl's intentions.

"Because I am rich enough to bribe you," was the unhesitating response: for the nobleman had already formed a pretty accurate idea of the attorney's character.

Green paused—reflected—and began to grow embarrassed. He knew not how to act—how much to demand—what terms to propose. Fearful of spoiling all, by carrying his extortionate views too high, he was likewise apprehensive of losing a large by agreeing to take a small amount.

The Earl guessed what was passing in his mind; and, pointing to writing materials that lay upon the table, he said, "Draw a cheque—and I will sign it."

Mr. Green sat down, and with trembling hand wrote a draft for five thousand pounds.

Lord Ellingham glanced over it, and immediately affixed his signature to the document, inserting the names of his bankers in the corner.

"Stop!" ejaculated Mr. Hatfield, starting up in his couch: "Arthur, retain that cheque—let not the villain take it!"

And the Earl of Ellingham instantly obeyed this injunction; while Green turned, with a countenance livid through rage and disappointment, towards the invalid.

"Not one shilling shall this man extort from us!" continued Mr. Hatfield, powerfully excited. "His story is a fabrication! There are no documents in existence which can have revealed our family secrets to him. He has been sent hither by an enemy—and who that enemy is I can too well divine!"

"Yes—yes—I understand you!" cried the Earl, the name of *Perdita* suggesting itself immediately to his memory; but at the same time he recollected that neither the Countess of Ellingham nor Lady Georgiana was acquainted with the secret of that fatal marriage which Charles had contracted.

"Vile—despicable tool that you are!" resumed Mr. Hatfield, addressing himself to the attorney: "I can see through all your conduct as if your very soul were transparent! The vengeance of an enemy sent you hither—and the demand which the Earl of Ellingham made respecting your object, was suggestive of this extortionate deed that you sought to perpetrate. Begone, sir—do your worst—we fear you not! You may reveal family matters that may cause pain—but you can do no serious injury: for if you allude to the secrets which I

myself am referring to, your malignant aim is completely baffled—inasmuch as the documents that could alone corroborate your assertions, are no longer in existence. I myself destroyed them!"

And thoroughly exhausted, Mr. Hatfield sank back upon the pillow.

At this moment the door was hastily opened; and Clarence Villiers rushed into the room.

"Pardon this abrupt intrusion," he exclaimed, not immediately noticing Green: "but I have news of some importance—though of horrible interest—to communicate. That woman *Perdita*, who ensnared my friend Charles with her wiles and witcheries, is no more!"

"Dead?" cried Mr. Hatfield, again starting up in the couch.

"Murdered—assassinated—and by her own husband!" ejaculated Villiers. "I was driving past Westbourne Terrace ere now—I saw a crowd—I heard appalling rumours—I enquired the cause—and I learnt the outline of the frightful tragedy! She is dead—and Barthelma, her husband, who destroyed her, has perished by his own hand!"

"Then Charles is beyond all danger for the future!" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield;—and again did he fall back on his pillow.

Lady Georgiana and the Countess of Ellingham hastened to administer restoratives to the invalid: although they themselves were greatly excited by the intelligence which had just arrived—for, it will be remembered, they were aware that Charles had fled from London with an abandoned woman who had gained a powerful ascendancy over him; and horrified as they were at the tidings of the murder, they could not help feeling that all apprehension of a relapse on the young man's part into the meshes of the intriguing *Perdita*, was now suddenly removed.

While the ladies were ministering to Mr. Hatfield, Clarence Villiers had turned and recognised Green, who was standing stupefied and motionless at the sudden news which revealed to him that his fair client *Perdita Barthelma* had been murdered!

"Ah! Mr. Green," exclaimed Villiers, in astonishment at beholding the attorney in the room; "what brings you hither?"

"Do you know this person, Clarence?" demanded the Earl, bending his looks with mingled indignation and abhorrence upon the man.

"I have been acquainted with him for many years—" began Villiers.

"Stop, sir!" cried the nobleman, again seizing the arm of the attorney, who was making for the door. "Before you leave us, you shall be thoroughly unmarked in the presence of a gentleman who appears to address you as a friend."

"Let me go, my lord!" exclaimed Green, struggling to get away; for he knew that Villiers could reveal a secret which would at once place the infamy of his character beyond question: "let me go, I say—you have no right to detain me against my will!"

"You shall remain yet a few minutes!" cried the Earl, holding his arm with a strong grasp. "This villain," continued the nobleman, turning towards Clarence, "came hither as the instrument of that woman *Perdita's* vengeance! That such is the fact, I have no doubt. But in a short time he changed his character—he began to act a part for himself—he played the scoundrel on his own account—and he attempted to extort from me the sum of five thousand pounds, as the purchase-

money for retaining all the secrets which Perdita could alone have revealed to him!"

"You offered me the money—and the amount was not extravagant, considering the purpose for which it was to have been given," said Green, glancing anxiously at Clarence Villiers.

"I told you to name your own terms—and you drew up this draft," exclaimed the Earl, exhibiting the slip of paper.

"Then, by heaven! forbearance in respect to such a man as you, is a positive crime on my part!" said Villiers, in an excited tone; and, seizing the wretched attorney by the collar, he cried, "You go not hence, Mr. Green, save in the custody of an officer, and under an accusation of forgery!"

"Forgery!" exclaimed the Earl, in amazement; and at the same time the ladies and Mr. Hatfield became interested observers of the scene that was now passing.

"Yes—forgery, my lord!" cried Villiers, still retaining his hold upon Green. "This man was left joint trustee with myself, on behalf of a youth who had a small sum bequeathed to him: the money was sold out of the funds years ago, my signature to the power of attorney being forged! That forgery was perpetrated by the villain before you. Some six months ago he replaced the money—he called upon me—he confessed the deed—he avowed his contrition—and I promised to shield him. But now, my lord—now, that he dares to set himself up as the persecutor of those whom I have so many reasons to esteem and revere,—now, that he has ventured to direct his villainies against the peace of an amiable family,—I cannot—will not—must not spare him!"

"No, Clarence—you shall keep your promise," said the Earl; "and perhaps the man may be moved by gratitude to repentance."

"My promise was conditional, my lord," exclaimed Villiers: "and if he have repented it otherwise to a living soul, he has uttered a falsehood. I declared to him at the time that I would forgive him, provided he undertook to enter upon the ways of rectitude and honesty: and it is he who has now forfeited his solemn pledge to that effect! No mercy, then, for this bad—this heartless man!"

"One word!" cried Green, in a menacing tone. "Fulfil your threat, Mr. Villiers, and I will at once—without the slightest hesitation or remorse—proclaim to all the world that the man known as Mr. Hatfield—"

"Silence, villain!" thundered Clarence: "silence!—or I will strangle you!"

"No—no—you shall not coerce me! I will speak out!" cried Green, struggling to disengage himself from the strong grasp in which he was held. "Mark what I say—hear me—hear me, all of you! Mr. Hatfield bears an assumed name—he is the Earl's eldest brother—the heir to the title—aye, and also Thomas Rainford, who was hanged at Horsemonger Lane Gaol!"

A blow from the clenched fist of Villiers felled the attorney as these last words burst from his lips;—and at the same instant a wild shriek, uttered by Lady Georgiana, rang through the room. For Mr. Hatfield had sunk back upon the pillow, with a low moan and a death-like pallor of countenance;—and almost immediately afterwards, blood oozed from his mouth.

All was now confusion and dismay in the chamber of the invalid: but at this juncture, Sir John Lancelles made his appearance. A few words, hurriedly spoken by the Earl of Ellingham, conveyed to the physician an idea of what had caused the relapse of his patient; and the worthy man speedily ordered the requisite restoratives. But these were all in vain:—Mr. Hatfield had broken a blood-vessel internally—and a few minutes after the arrival of the doctor, he expired without a groan!

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We must draw a veil over the scene of sorrow which the chamber of death presented, and which we cannot find words to describe. The intensity of that anguish was increased by the almost frantic grief of Charles Hatfield, who, having been out for several hours upon his own and his father's business, returned but a few minutes too late to witness the sad catastrophe.

He threw himself upon the corpse of his sire—uttered the most passionate lamentations—and even pushed his mother aside when she endeavoured to console him.

But at length a reaction came; and the violence of the young man's grief gave way to a profound sorrow,—a sorrow that was deeply, deeply shared by many other hearts!

In the confusion that had taken place when Lady Georgiana's scream echoed through the room, denoting the occurrence of something dreadful,—Green had risen from the floor and made his escape, inwardly cursing himself for having undertaken to become the agent of Perdita's vengeance.

But Villiers, who entertained the most sincere friendship for Mr. Hatfield, and who was goaded almost to madness by the conduct of the vile attorney towards the man whom he thus loved as a brother, vowed that such infamy should not go unpunished. Scarcely, therefore, had the terrible conviction burst upon all present in the chamber of death, that Mr. Hatfield was indeed no more, when Villiers rushed frantically in pursuit of him whom he looked upon as the murderer!

The chase was successful—and in less than half an hour, Green was in custody on a charge of forgery!

CONCLUSION.

OUR narrative is about to close: but ere we lay aside the pen, a few observations are requisite in order to render the history of each prominent character as complete as possible. Several have already been disposed of: but there yet remain many in whose fate the reader may feel more or less interested; and we accordingly proceed to sum up in a few words all the particulars which are wanting to the faithful accomplishment of our task.

Mr. Green in due time figured at the Old Bailey, where Clarence Villiers appeared to prosecute him for forgery; but the prisoner pleaded guilty; in order to obtain the merciful consideration of the court, and was sentenced to transportation for seven years, instead of for the term of his natural life. Preparatory, however, to his expatriation, he was lodged in one of the convict-hulks at Woolwich; and there he encountered his friend Jack Ruly the Doctor, who, instead of consoling the wretched attorney, only laughed at him for the tears which he shed and the useless repinings to which he gave vent. Mr. Green is at this present moment occupied in the healthy but disagreeable task of repairing the

high roads in Van Diemen's Land, in company with some of the greatest scoundrels that ever disgraced the human species; and he even looks back with bitter regret to those times when he was the oppressed, crushed, and despised instrument of James Heathcote. Nor was it a source of solace to Mr. Green when one fine morning, about ten months ago, he recognised the Doctor in a new-comer who was thus added to the gang of convicts: for Mr. Rily, having endeavoured to stir up his brethren in the Woolwich hulk to rebellion, was discovered in the attempt and forthwith packed off to the island which Nature had in the origin made a terrestrial paradise, but which the English Government has converted into "a den of thieves."

James Heathcote, being utterly ruined by the transfer of all his property for the benefit of the numerous clients whom he had robbed,—for this affair was completely carried out by Green's head clerk,—was compelled to abandon his fine house and take a humble office where he strove hard to reconstruct his once extensive business. But the exposure which his character had received in the Court of Queen's Bench, proved a fatal blow to his prospects and an insurmountable obstacle in his path; and at the end of six months, being unable to pay his rent, he was turned out of the little nook to which he had retired, and plunged into the deepest poverty. At this juncture his brother Sir Gilbert returned to England; and James wrote him a penitential letter, imploring his succour. The baronet refused to see him, but generously undertook to allow him two guineas a-week in order to keep him from starving; and on this pittance—for such it is in comparison with the wealth he once possessed—the broken-down, baffled, and dispirited man still subsists in some suburb of the metropolis.

The Reverend Mr. Sheepshanks has experienced many ups and downs since we last saw him at the lunatic asylum in Bethnal Green. It appears that one evening Dr. Swinton gave a grand supper to the relatives and friends of his pensioners, who were present on the occasion as usual; and that previously to the repast being served up, the Doctor had been holding forth in a highly eulogistic style upon the excellent qualities, Christian virtues, and profound piety of his chaplain. Now the Reverend Mr. Sheepshanks was out at the time, the Doctor both declaring and believing that "the good man had gone to pay his usual evening visits to the poor in the neighbourhood;" and the guests were all very anxious for the return of the worthy individual who possessed such numerous claims upon their esteem, veneration, and respect. But the truth was—and the truth *must* be told—that the Reverend Mr. Sheepshanks, instead of visiting the poor or even dreaming of such a thing, was smoking his pipe and drinking his gin-and-water at the *Cat and the Fiddle* in Globe Town; and as he happened to take an extra pipe and two extra glasses on this particular occasion, the fumes thereof became more potent than the odour of sanctity. The consequence was that on his return to the lunatic asylum, his walk was so unsteady and irregular that his progress up the gravel walk to the front door resembled that of a ship tacking about in the Channel: and when he entered the supper-room, just as the company were sitting down to the well-spread table, his nose was so red, his cheeks so flushed, and his eyes so vacant and watery, that the Doctor inquired in a tone of bland anxiety if he

were unwell? "No, sir—I am quite well—and I am all right!" was the somewhat savage answer.—"Then will you have the kindness to ask a blessing, Mr. Sheepshanks?" said the Doctor.—"No, sir," responded the pious gentleman: "I will see you and the blessing at the devil first. You're drunk, sir—and I'm ashamed of you."—It would be impossible to describe the dismay—we might almost term it horrified amazement—which this peremptory refusal to say grace, and the scandalous attack upon Dr. Swinton's sobriety, produced amongst the guests. The physician himself started up in a furious rage, forgetful of all his propriety; and applying his right foot to the proper quarter, he kicked the Reverend Mr. Sheepshanks ignominiously forth from the lunatic asylum. On the following morning this pious gentleman, who was endowed with so many Christian virtues, awoke in a station-house to a sense of his altered position; but when introduced to the notice of a magistrate for being "drunk and disorderly, and kicking up a row at Dr. Swinton's door," he boldly proclaimed himself a martyr, and held forth at great length, and in a peculiar nasal drone, on the vanities of this world. The magistrate was, however, compelled to cut him short, by inflicting a fine: but as Mr. Sheepshanks had exhausted all his pecuniary resources at the *Cat and the Fiddle* on the preceding evening, he was doomed to extend his experience of worldly vanities beneath the roof of the House of Correction. There he found that the treadmill was one of the most uncomfortable vanities he had ever yet encountered; and the redness of his nose was considerably subdued by the prison skilly. On his emancipation at the end of a week, he took up his abode at the house of a poor widow with whom he was acquainted, and whom he induced to convert her front-parlour into a receptacle for prayer-meetings. This succeeded very well for a few months, the congregation being delighted with Mr. Sheepshanks' discourse, and a tolerable amount of pence being collected every evening in furtherance of the pious gentleman's holy purpose of supplying the benighted Esquimaux with flannel-jackets and religious tracts: but the widow proving at length to be in the family-way, and Mr. Sheepshanks not choosing to wait to have the paternity of the expected offspring fixed upon his reverend shoulders, his sudden evaporation from the neighbourhood led to the break-up of the prayer-meetings and the total ruin of the unfortunate woman. What became of Mr. Sheepshanks for the next six months, we cannot say: but one fine Sunday morning he turned up at the Obelisk in St. George's Fields, where he addressed a crowd in his usual strain. His discourse was however suddenly cut short by the presence of the poor widow, who, wrapped in rags and with a baby in her arms, was begging in that neighbourhood; and when the reverend gentleman's delinquencies were proclaimed by the miserable woman, he was hooted, pelted, and maltreated all up the Westminster-road, until he managed to escape from his assailants by diving into one of the narrow streets leading out of that great thoroughfare. After this affair, the pious man again disappeared for a season; and when we last heard of him, he had given up preaching as a trade which he had thoroughly worn out, and had betaken himself to the highly respectable and cheering avocation of beating the drum and playing the mouth-organ—*alias* pandean pipes—for a colleague who exhibited a Punch and Judy show.

We must now direct attention to Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Frank Curtis. Upon the strength of the handsome pecuniary present made to them by Lord William Trevelyan, the former forthwith dubbed himself *Major*; and for the first six weeks after this self-bestowed elevation, he was under the disagreeable necessity of thrashing his bosom friend soundly at least once a day for being oblivious of the new rank and calling him *Captain*. At length he succeeded in completely beating into the head of Frank Curtis that he was really a Major; and when they were seated together one evening over their whisky-and-water, at some public-house, the gallant Irishman never failed to recount to his companion all the military services he had rendered the State, and all the splendours of his paternal mansion of Blunderbus Park, Connemara. These statements, though ostensibly addressed to Mr. Frank Curtis, were really intended for the behoof of the frequenters of the parlours where they were enunciated; and the quiet tradesmen into whose ears the flaming narratives were thus dinned, ended by being particularly proud of the acquaintance of Major Gorman O'Blunderbuss. At length, what with succulent dinners at eating-houses and oceans of "potheen" every evening, the rum to liberally given by Lord William Trevelyan came to a termination; and the two friends were one day holding a council of war—or rather sitting in "committee of ways and means"—when a paragraph in the newspaper informed them that Lady Blunt and her son had been upset in a boat during an aquatic excursion at Richmond, and drowned "in spite of all the efforts made by the footman to save them." Up jumped both the Major and Frank Curtis in ecstasies of joy, disolving themselves as a committee then and there by kicking over the table; and away they sped to the mansion in Jermyn Street. The intelligence was true: Lady Blunt and her son were no more;—and the stout footman was disconsolate. There was no will; and Frank Curtis accordingly found himself, as if by magic, the heir-at-law to all those possessions from which his uncle had sought to exclude him years ago. The day on which the remains of the deceased lady and her son were consigned to the tomb, was the happiest that Major O'Blunderbuss and his friend had ever passed in their lives: for the gallant officer resolved to make a regular Irish wake of it, and the good "potheen" circulated so rapidly that the assembled mourners alarmed the whole street with their noise and laughter. And a most refreshing spectacle was it when Major O'Blunderbuss, with a view to enhance the hilarity of the scene, kicked the stout footman completely out of the house and tossed his clothes and wages ignominiously from the window. In the course of a few days the two friends paid a visit to Mr. Strongitharms, the celebrated engraver in St. James's Street, for the purpose of having their cards printed with their armorial bearings on the top; and when Frank blandly directed the shopman who took the order to write down in his book the names of Mr. Curtis and Major O'Blunderbuss, the latter exclaimed in a tone of mingled indignation and disgust, "Be Jasse! Frank, and your mimicry grows worse and worse every day: for, be the holy poker-rl and isn't it Colonel O'Blunderbuss that I am, the new rank being conferred upon me by her Gracious Majesty for my services in the East Indies?"—The shopman wrote down *Colonel O'Blunder-*

buss accordingly; and as a colonel is the gallant gentleman known at the present day. Reader, if you happen to be passing along Jermyn Street any time in the evening after five o'clock, you will hear such shouts of laughter and peals of merriment issuing from one of the houses, that there can be no mistake as to the identity of that dwelling. We need not tell you the number of the mansion, because you cannot fail to discover where Colonel O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Curtis reside by means of the uproarious sounds that emanate from the front-parlour, in spite of the closed shutters and heavy draperies. And to tell you the truth, the neighbours look upon that house as a complete nuisance; and rents are falling rapidly in the immediate neighbourhood—for quiet old bachelor-gentlemen, families, and even young blades about town, are frightened away from the lodgings that are let in the three or four nearest tenements on either side of the one where the two friends have settled themselves. But these worthies care nothing for the opinion of their neighbours and are deaf to all remonstrances: they lead a jolly life after their own hearts and in their own peculiar fashion—and to witness them in their happy domesticity, a stranger unacquainted with their history could not tell that the house and the fortune both belonged to Frank Curtis, for the Colonel is as much master of both dwelling and purse as his devoted friend.

Although Rosalie, the French lady's-maid, has not performed a very conspicuous part on the stage of our narrative, we are nevertheless induced to trace her career up to the present time. Compelled to appear as a witness at the Coroner's Inquest which was holden upon her late master and mistress, she attracted the notice of a young baronet who attended the proceedings through motives of curiosity; and as the overtures which he subsequently made her, were far from displeasing, she accepted them after a due amount of affected hesitation. The baronet was rich, and provided in a sumptuous manner for his mistress. He hired and furnished a house for her accommodation in a fashionable street at the West End—bought her a brougham and pair of handsome bays—took for her use a box at the Opera—and allowed her fifty guineas a month for her domestic expenses. In return for this generosity, she treated him with a capriciousness that would have been intolerable on the part of a sensible man, but which only confirmed the insatiable spendthrift's infatuation. Rosalie's conduct was a matter of calculation, and not the unavoidable result of a wilful disposition. She knew that she had only to be kind and winning, in order to coax him into any extravagant expenditure which would minister to her enjoyments; and her smiles were thus literally purchased with gold and diamonds. Six months only did the baronet's fortune stand this wanton dereliction; and when he could no longer draw cheques for the sums which she required, she at once accepted the "protection" of an old nobleman who made her very handsome offers, and who was in his dotage. But now mark the wayward inconsistency of this woman's conduct! The moment she ceased to be dependent upon the baronet, she conceived a violent affection for him—was never happy save when in his society—bestowed upon him two-thirds of the money which she received from the ancient peer—and even stinted herself

supply his extravagances. She never treated him with the slightest indication of caprice—but served him as if she were a purchased slave, and he a Pacha. He gave way to intemperance, and in his drunken freaks would beat and ill-use her. She endured it all without a murmur, so long as he would *forgive* her when he was sober! At length the old nobleman died one day of indigestion—and Rosalie passed into the keeping of a Bishop. The Right Reverend Father was one of the most staunch supporters of all measures for the better observance of the Sabbath. He hated Sunday trading as something a shade or two worse than wilful murder—and no one declaimed more eloquently than he against the steam-boats plying on the Lord's Day. He even wished to prevent the railway-trains from running on the Sabbath; and his heart rejoiced when he read in the newspapers that apple-women, orange-girls, and shrimp-boys had been taken into custody for attempting to earn a penny to buy a meal on the "day of rest." But every Sunday evening this respectable old prelate made it a rule to dine with his mistress—aye, and remain with her too until past twelve at night; and heaven only knows what lying excuses he made to his wife for these intervals of absence. He was, however, far more stingy towards Rosalie than the deceased nobleman; and she accordingly cut him in favour of his Archdeacon, who was as unmitigated an old sinner as himself. Meantime the baronet continued to be the young woman's real favourite; and when he happened to find himself locked up in the Quern's Bench Prison, she never failed to visit him every day. Her diamonds—her jewels—her rings—her very watch she pawned to raise the sum necessary to procure his release; although the more his temper grew soured by adversity, the more brutal became his conduct towards her. From the keeping of the Archdeacon, she passed into that of a wealthy tradesman who had a splendid establishment in Regent Street. He likewise had a wife and six children; but he neglected them for the sake of his mistress—and while he grudged the former even common necessities, he lavished all his gains upon the latter. At length he learnt that Rosalie was constantly visited by the baronet; and he broke off the connexion. No admirer immediately appearing to supply his place, the Frenchwoman wrote a very pretty letter to the Bishop, complimenting him upon his last speech against Sunday-trading, and declaring how much pleasure she should experience if he would honour her with a visit. The invitation was irresistible—the prelate went—and the result was that Rosalie once more became his mistress. The renewal of their connexion has not since been interrupted; and the baronet is still the object of the young woman's affection—still the recipient of two-thirds of all the money she can obtain—and still the only person in the world who would dare to raise his hand against her.

For nearly a year after his attempted suicide, the Marquis of Delmour lived happily with his wife, the past being buried in oblivion. Lady Delmour devoted herself to her husband as far as her own blighted and crushed affections would permit; and she at least had the supreme felicity of witnessing the unalloyed happiness which was experienced by Lord William Trevelyan and the lovely Agnes, who were united about six months after the

reconciliation of the young lady's parents, the consent of the Lord Chancellor being obtained to sanction the marriage. But in the summer of 1847 the Marquis of Delmour was seized with a sudden and alarming illness; and in spite of the unwearied attentions of Sir John Lascelles and Lady Delmour, the old nobleman succumbed to the tyrant sway of Death. Upwards of a year has elapsed since that event; and we observe by a recent paragraph in the newspapers that the Marchioness has bestowed her hand upon Sir Gilbert Heathcote.

Lord William Trevelyan and Agnes are as happy as mortals can hope to be on earth. Their mode of life is somewhat secluded—for it is in each other's society that their enjoyment of existence consists. Their charity is unbounded, but bestowed privately and unostentatiously; and although you will never hear the name of Lord William Trevelyan proclaimed from the platform of Exeter Hall, amidst a list of liberal subscribers to Missionary Societies and other legalised swindles and robberies of the same class, yet rest assured that many and many a poor family has reason to bless that good nobleman and his amiable wife.

Timothy Splint, *alias* Tim the Snammer, continues the occupant of a fine farm in the backwoods of the United States: indeed, the property has spread out to an extent which renders the denomination of "estate" the more correct one. Joshua Pedlar and his wife have prospered equally well in Canada; and they are now in possession of a large mercantile establishment at Quebec. Mrs. Bunce is dead: but her husband still resides at Saint Peter's Port in Guernsey, and earns a very comfortable livelihood. Jeffreys leads a steady, industrious life at Liverpool, where he has become a substantial merchant, and is deservedly respected. Had all these persons been consigned to the horrors of transportation to a penal colony, their redemption from sin would have become an impossibility: but when placed in a condition to earn an honourable independence, even *murderers* may be put to a better use than hanging them like dogs, or sending them into the midst of a vile community where their example would only produce a deeper demoralisation.

Poor Mr. Bubbleton Styles, having failed in getting up his Railway Company, was compelled to pass through the Insolvents' Court; and during the eighteen months which have elapsed since that event, he has turned his attention to at least a dozen different occupations. On his discharge from the process of white-washing in Portugal Street, he became a wine-merchant; but finding that this market was completely glutted, he entered the coal and coke trade—with may be a little dealing in slates as a necessary adjunct thereto. This speculation not succeeding "for want of capital," Mr. Styles turned drysalter—then town-traveller for an ale-brewer—then commission-agent for a house in the woollen line—and then something else. But none of these occupations answering his purpose, and hearing of the good luck which had befallen his friends O'Blunderbuss and Curtis, he put on his last clean shirt and paid them a visit. His reception was not at first very encouraging, inasmuch as the gallant Irishman commenced by knocking him down and bunting up his right eye, for the simple reason that Mr. Styles was unaware of that formidable gentleman's elevation to the rank of *Colonel*, and had called him *Captain*: but when explanations took place, complete harmony was restored; and the

worthy Bubbleton, having been made uncommonly drunk by his two friends, received a cheque for a hundred guineas to enable him to begin the world again. He has made the recommencement accordingly, and seems in a fair way to get a living by adhering to one particular occupation instead of having a hundred upon his hands at the same time.

Clarence Villiers and Adelais continue to reside at Brompton. They are well off in a pecuniary point of view; and though the ardent love of their youth has mellowed down into a deep attachment, still are they as happy in each other's society as they were in those days when the marriage-state was as yet new with them. And often and often, when seated together of an evening, do they speak with never-failing gratitude and regret of poor Tom Rain!

Our readers will doubtless recollect the manuscript which Lord William Trevelyan discovered at the lunatic-asylum in Bethnal Green, and which recorded the experiences of a victim to that detestable system of quackery which the law allows. We may as well observe that in the course of a short tour which the young nobleman and his wife took to the south of France, a few months back, Trevelyan encountered Mr. Macdonald, the author of that lamentable history. This gentleman had completely recovered his mental equilibrium, and was living in a strict but happy seclusion with his Editha and their son. Trevelyan communicated to him the circumstances under which he had found the manuscript, and the motives which had induced him to convey it away from its place of concealment in the mad-house. Macdonald expressed his fervent gratitude for the young nobleman's generosity; and the papers were consigned to the flames. We will not mention the name of the town where Mr. Macdonald is residing: for, were we guilty of such imprudence, the extortioner would be assuredly sent after him.

We have now to speak of the inmates of Ellingham House. Reader, the family circle there is as happy as the mournful reminiscence of Mr. Hatfield's sudden death will permit. Charles has become the husband of the beautiful and accomplished Lady Frances; and the youthful pair continue to dwell at the Earl's mansion. Lady Georgiana is

likewise a permanent resident beneath the same roof; and her son amply repays her by his affectionate devotion for any temporary uneasiness or grief which he might have caused her at the lamentable period of his connexion with Perdita. Sir John Lascelles is a frequent visitor at the mansion in Pall Mall; and we need scarcely add that he is always a welcome guest.

The Republic of Castalcicala flourishes under the free institutions which General Markham gave it. It is the Model-State in Europe; and appears to be the solution of a problem whether it is possible for honest rulers, a conscientious legislature, and a democratic system to extirpate poverty from a country, and make an entire people contented, free, and prosperous. There the Rights of Labour are recognised in all the plenitude of industry's claims: there no man who is willing to work, can possibly starve. Mendicity is unknown throughout the Republic; and when the Castalcicalans read paragraphs translated from the English papers into their own prints, and detailing how men, women and children die of starvation—aye, and very frequently too—in the British Islands, they say to each other, "It is a hideous mockery to pretend that true freedom has any existence there!"

But, thank God! the tide of liberal sentiments is rolling rapidly over Europe—sweeping away the remnants of feudal barbarism—levelling all oppressive institutions—compelling tyrants to bend to the will of the masses—and giving such an impulse to enlightened notions as the world never saw before. And may that tide still flow on with unabating force—not wearing off the asperities of barbaric systems by degrees, but whirling all abuses away at once and in a moment;—not proceeding without certainty or uniformity, like a stream that is sometimes free and sometimes checked—but rushing on in a channel that is broad and deep;—not here diverted from its course by some obstacle—nor there dammed up until the weight of its waters break down the impediment,—but rolling on with a mighty and irresistible volume, and expanding into a glorious and illimitable flood!

THE END.

